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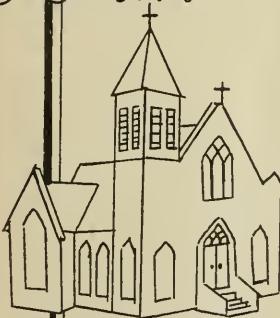
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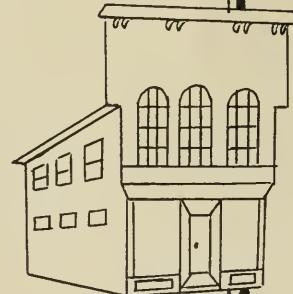
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1869 -- 1969



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A Dramatic and Spectacular Pageant

PRESENTED AT

8:00 P.M. Piper City High School Gymnasium

AUGUST 29-30-31, 1969

*“WAGONS TO WINGS” was written by Mrs. J. D. Somers and is being produced by Mrs. James Stuckey. The Centennial Chorus is under the direction of Mrs. Glenn Gibb.*

*All local talent has been used in writing and staging this historical pageant of ten dramatic scenes depicting over 100 years of local history.*

*Mrs. Thees Sterrenberg, Piper City, Ill. 60959 is in charge of advance sale of tickets.*



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# Wagons to Wings

A HISTORY OF PIPER CITY

by

PEG JOHNSTON



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My first acknowledgments are going to be to the last who made contributions to this history of Piper City. First, to Amy Somers, for naming the pageant and history *Wagons to Wings* and to Duane Hitchens who did the art work in connection with the title. Duane also did the sketches of the Opperman band chariot and of *Old Brenton House*.

Another one of our young persons who is to be credited is Miss Nancy Stamm, who did the art work for the cover.

Gordon Downs did the sketches of the Fourth of July picnic and herding the cattle across the Kankakee River.

Many have helped in the research by loaning books or newspaper clippings. The 1884 *Atlas of Ford County* and the *Standard Atlas of Ford County* of 1901 were used as references.

I was fortunate to have a scrapbook, kept by someone a long time ago whose identity has been lost, which had clippings of obituaries, weddings and important events to about 1918 or 1920.

Mrs. A. W. Opperman loaned me the two-volume *Ford County History of 1908*. Mrs. Henry Chamberlain loaned me *Illinois 1837* and Mr. and Mrs. Oscar

Stamm loaned me an *1891 Fair Book* that was helpful in compiling the fair history.

Only two sources were used for the account of the great train wreck of 1887 and they were the August 12, 1887 issue of the *Piper City Pan Handle Advocate* and the January-February, 1969 issue of *Illiniwek*.

Valuable newspapers were loaned to me by John Nordstrom of Loda and Harvard (Skip) Ficklin. D. Earle Wilson contributed much to the *Personal Glimpses* part of this history with his reminiscences and vignettes of people of the 1900-1920 era.

Two histories written by young people were also helpful. One was written by the junior class of 1941 and was loaned to me by Mrs. Duane White. The other was compiled about five years ago by Mrs. David Monk. Mrs. W. G. Raudabaugh loaned the material that had been gathered in 1959 for the Ford County Centennial committee.

I am grateful to all who have helped me or even encouraged me in any way. I have also been assisted in typing by Mrs. John Ark, Mrs. Thees Sterrenberg and Mrs. Richard Alexander.

Mrs. Glenn Gibb wrote the original theme music for the centennial and pageant.

June, 1969

Peg Johnston

# Piper City Centennial Theme

Words + Music  
F. Gibb

Moderato

Piano Introduct.

Voice

Eighteen sixty nine in Pi-per Ci-ty, It be-gan a hun-dred years a-go — Lew-is, Par-sans, Cross, and

Pi-per, too, Felt the call, planned it all, Then they hand-ed it on down and How we've grown in Pi-per Ci-ty,

Let's not stop it here — Hear! We are cel-e-bra-ting this fair vil-la-ge's centu-ry of pro-gress this year!

# Wagons to Wings

## THE EARLY DAYS

*These are the Gardens of the West — these  
The unshorn fields, boundless and beautiful,  
And fresh as the young earth ere man had sinned,  
The Prairies! I behold them for the first  
And my heart swells, while the dilated sight  
Takes in the encircling vastness. Lo! they stretch  
In airy undulations, far away,  
As if the ocean, in his gentlest swell,  
Stood still, with all his rounded billows fixed,  
And motionless forever, — Motionless? —  
No — they're all unchained again. The clouds  
Sweep o'er with their shadows, and beneath  
The surface rolls and fluctuates to the eye:  
Dark hollows seem to run along, and chase  
The sunny ridges.*

— *Illinois, 1837*

Nowhere, other than in Central Illinois, was the early phenomenon of the prairie more in evidence. We can only guess whether the hearts of the early settlers swelled at the magnificence of the "encircling vastness" or quailed in fear at the trackless and heretofore almost unpenetrated wilderness.

The first pioneers who pressed into Illinois followed the streams and portages and only the state surveyors and a few Indians had crisscrossed the inland area around what is now known as Piper City at the time of the coming of the first settlers.

The first to come were Mr. and Mrs. John R. Lewis and Mr. and Mrs. Mark Parsons, in 1856. The Lewises arrived first, and the Parsons only a day later. From Mr. Lewis' obituary we learn that there was no other house to be seen anywhere and that one could ride 30 miles north without coming across a settlement.

Another man, S. Standish, arrived in 1856, but there is little recorded of him other than his arrival. Perhaps he did not stay long. Piper City was extremely fortunate, however, to have two settlers of the caliber of Lewis and Parsons and their families.

Both men lived to be what was considered then a "ripe old age" and both filled many positions of trust and importance in the community. Parsons was 76 when he died in 1899, and Lewis died in 1901 at the age of 73. Mr. and Mrs. Lewis moved to Chicago in 1871, where he sold real estate, but returned in 1878, and they lived here for the rest of their lives.

Lewis, especially, was a man of boundless energy and of high intelligence. He had more edu-

cation than most men of his day. Born in Herkimer County, New York, from Welsh stock, he attended Whitestown Seminary for three years and taught school for three winters before emigrating to Illinois.

In 1850 he decided to go west and migrated to Naperville, Illinois, where he farmed and taught school until 1855. In 1851 he married Delia O. Johnson, a native of Vermont. Together they came to this area in 1856. Their son, born August 4, 1857, was the second baby born in the community. The first birth was Hattie B. Bartlett in June of 1857.

Mr. and Mrs. Parsons had the third child born here when their son Jesse arrived August 26, also in the year of 1857.

Mark Parsons was born in Sunderland, Vermont, and in 1846 married Jane Crossett. In 1847 they moved to Will County, Illinois, and in 1856 settled about five miles south of what is now Piper City. After nine years they moved to about one mile south of town and just 100 years ago from our centennial year — in 1869 — they moved into town where he ran a store for several years.

He was caretaker of the Presbyterian Church and his punctuality and fidelity left a lasting impression on the early church-goers. He was recalled as having paced back and forth in the vestibule with watch in hand, awaiting the exact moment to ring the bell for church services.

It was also his unhappy duty to climb to the church belfry and toll the bell with a wooden mallet at the time of the death of any citizen. The townspeople would stop what they were doing and count the number of times the bell was tolled and



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in that way could sometimes surmise whose death had occurred, for the bell was tolled once for each year of life.

#### HERITAGE LIES IN PRAIRIE

But the beginning of our history lies in the prairie, and if we are to understand and appreciate our heritage we must understand and appreciate the wild implacable land that beckoned with the siren song of unbelievable fertility and yet threatened darkly of swamps, reptiles, wild animals, and loneliness.

The men who dreamed dreams of the future of this land saw it crisscrossed with railroads, dotted with little villages springing up so that the grain from the fertile fields could be shipped to market, and the things needed for trade could be brought in over the railroad.

The coming of what is now called the Toledo, Peoria, and Western Railroad in 1857 was a momentous occasion, but one fraught with some surprise. The railroad was built in a line almost due east and west across the north edge of Township 26. A long side track was laid on the north half of Section 2. At this time there were no settlers near the railroad, and a little to the west of the side track there was a big slough that completely cut off all communications from the west. East of the side track there were no settlers within the boundary of the Pan Handle. (Although Ford County was not yet formed, this term applies to the northern part of what later became the County, and in shape does indeed resemble the handle of a pan.) The motive of the railway company in building the side track in such a place was beyond the comprehension of any of the settlers, but it was soon learned that there was to be a town there, called Brenton.

#### THE OLD HOTEL

A landmark long familiar to people of this area was the "old hotel" that was razed with little note or fanfare in 1962. Sometimes called the "Old Brenton House" it was the first good, wooden structure to be built on the virgin prairie in 1858 or '59 by Lyne Starling.

Starling was a young man who had emigrated from New York and became a large land owner in both Brenton and Pella Townships.

An old Ford County history suggests that he may have been emulating his cousin, Michael L. Sullivant, who in 1854 began to buy land northwest of what was later the town of Paxton. Sullivant's holdings became known as "the largest corn farm in the World under one man's management." Later, he sold much of his land to Hiram



OLD HOTEL

Sibley.

The history reports that early settlers were encouraged to see Starling's hotel as a mark of progress in the new land. And well they should have, for when the old hotel was coming down, many expressed admiration for the care and precision of the pioneer builder. Walnut and oak were used throughout the structure and the foundation was of flat limestone rock.

The sills were scored and hewn by hand with a board axe and foot adze. Two by sixes were used throughout, and all corners were re-enforced with six by sixes and storm braced by four by sixes. The sills were morticed and pinned, and solid sheeting one and one-quarter inch thick was used under the weather-boarding.

There were nine rooms, with four fireplaces — two upstairs, and two down.

The front door was of Colonial design made of poplar wood, and had panes of glass around the side and top.

The old hotel stood for over a century with very little repair or upkeep and was so well constructed that it could probably have stood for another century.

After its usefulness as a hotel was gone, the structure was moved to a spot a quarter of a mile north of its first location and was used as a farm home until the 1930's.

In the early days the hotel was a stopping-off place for travelers and pioneers who came to this territory by railroad (and that was almost everybody, in those days).

The railroad breathed life into the old hotel in its early days when the nearest trading centers were Chatsworth, seven miles to the west, and Gilman, ten miles to the east.

A small center of trade developed around the

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railroad spur or side track. A small grain terminal developed, and it was believed that a town would grow up in this location. The spot was called "Brenton" and later "Old Brenton."

#### PIPER CITY PLATTED

But less than a decade after Brenton House was built, Dr. William Piper, of Philadelphia, and Samuel Cross, of Chicago — both large land owners — contracted with County Surveyor, H. J. Howe, in 1867, to plat the village that later was named Piper City, for Dr. Piper. This spot was two miles west of Brenton and the new location was at first called New Brenton.

Very soon the first general store was opened by John Allen and W. C. Jones. John R. Lewis served as the first postmaster, receiving and dispensing mail from his residence.

Dr. Piper and his nephew, John A. Montelius, also opened a general store and built a grain elevator. Houses were built and the community began to grow. Incorporation papers were signed in 1869.

Following the Civil War there was a land rush and land buyers came pouring into town, getting off with every train that stopped, many of them coming from the east after reading pamphlets put out by the railroad companies telling of the great opportunities awaiting them on the virgin prairies. These pamphlets were circulated in foreign countries and many foreign emigrants began arriving, too.

The railroads had bought vast holdings of land, and their purpose was to get the country settled as quickly as possible. Their informative pamphlets traced step by step a bright future for prairie farmers.

#### JOHN R. LEWIS, LAND AGENT

John R. Lewis was uniquely able by intelligence and aptitude to handle land sales. He was a surveyor and had as good an understanding of law as most. He later was admitted to the bar, but never actively practiced law as it was not his "greatest interest."

Lewis became land agent for the Illinois Central in 1866 and was quite efficient in dealing with the men who came in feverish excitement to vie for a "stake" in this new community.

An old newspaper article refers to Lewis as the "master spirit of the land situation", and in truth he sold more than any other agent in Ford County.

For some it was the opening of a new world, and many did make their fortunes in the new land; but it was not always as easy as the pamphlets circulated in the east would make one believe.



DR. WILLIAM A. PIPER

George H. Thompson, who settled in Lyman Township, writes in the Ford County Atlas — 1884:

*"The years 1857-58-59 were hard times for the new settlers on the Illinois Central lands. Crops were short, and the people all pretty poor. They often received relief from their wives' relatives in the East, but the yearly interest on the lands purchased from the railroad company could not be met, and many fearing they would lose their little homes were troubled. S. K. Marston, the only man who had a respectable suit of clothes to wear to Chicago, was sent to interview the land officials of the company.*

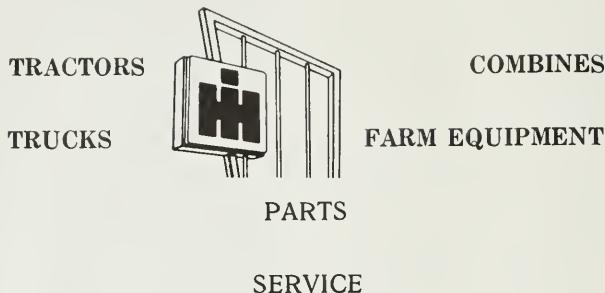
*"Arrangements were made to get the payments extended, and some seed wheat was forwarded and loaned to those who needed, and by economizing in all things, using peas and rye for coffee, red root for tea, sorghum for sweetening, and then patching up old clothes, they bridged over these bad years."*

#### EARLY RECOLLECTION

John R. Lewis set down some of his early recollections:

*"The spring of 1857 was noted for the large influx of new settlers, and carpenters who came on to build their houses for them, among the latter I remember Elisha and Nathaniel Sherman, of Onarga, and Mr. Needham. These three had others helping them, and it was with difficulty that they found boarding places. Among the first of the new settlers who came were Messrs. Samuel and Michael Cross. These began putting up a house on the northwest quarter of the northwest quarter of Section 4, Township 26, Mr. Needham superintending the work.*

*"They boarded with John R. Lewis and traveled four miles morning and evening to and from work.*



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Soon after these came, which was in April, it was discovered that a house was being built on the northeast quarter of northeast quarter of Section 20, for a family from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, named McKinney. The next house to be built was for Ira Z. Congdon on the northeast corner of Section 32. Mr. Congdon came from near New London, Connecticut, along with what was known as the "Connecticut settlers," mention of whom will be made hereafter.

"A little to the west of Mr. Congdon, on the same section, Mr. Wallace W. Wicks commenced improving a farm, but did not build on it. Mr. Aaron Schofield built on the west half of the southwest quarter of Section 30, and at the same time Mr. Conrad Volp put up a house on the southeast quarter of Section 10. He came from near Albany, New York, and brought with him his three youngest sons, George, Henry and Christopher, the oldest, Charles, having come out the summer before and taken up his abode with A. J. Barilett.

"All these settlers were near each other, but a few began to arrive and take up land in the northern townships, which seemed to us at that time quite a long way off. The first of these was Mr. Robert Hall, who came from New York State. He had purchased a large tract of land from the I. C. Railroad Company, and built his house on the southwest corner of Section 28, Township 27, and soon after a young man from near Boston, Massachusetts, put in an appearance, and commenced to build a small house on Section 22. He had no family and "kept back." His name was Henry Atwood. A little later in the summer, Mr. Joseph Davis, from Ohio, settled on the northwest quarter of the southwest quarter of Section 6, Township 26. Most of these settlers arrived in time to break up some land and put it into corn."

## CONNECTICUT SETTLEMENT

Mr. Lewis continued:

"I will now go back to the time the Connecticut settlement, of which I have spoken, was organized.

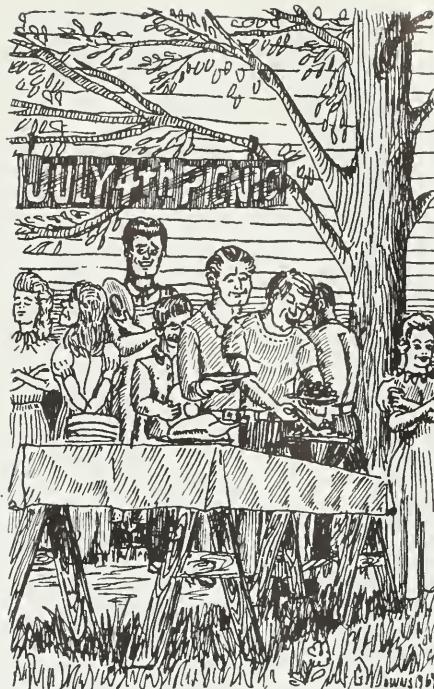
"During the winter of 1855-56, an organization was affected by a few citizens in and around New London in the State of Connecticut, under the name of the Working Man's Settlement Association with the following named persons as members:

"W. A. Babcock, President; R. A. Hungerford, Secretary; S. K. Marston, Treasurer; M. E. Morgan, E. Marston, B. F. Field, Urbane Havens, Ira Z. Congdon, R. R. Piersons, Rev. P. J. Williams, George B. Clark, J. H. Lester, S. P. Avery, W. H. Bently, Sidney A. Morgan, Theophilus Morgan, B. N. Marston, William Appley, James S. Maxon, C. A. Marston, E. F. Havens, W. S. Larkin, Gil R. LaPlace, D. T. Hutchinson, James Miller, Robert Eccleston, U. S. Bossie, H. C. Dennis, E. C. Morgan, John Isham.

"In September, 1856, the first permanent settlers belonging to the colony arrived. While passing through Chicago, they purchased 100,000 feet of lumber for building purposes, and had it shipped to Onarga, to which place they all were bound.

"In April and May, 1857, all these settlers moved onto their lands in the Pan Handle, and began making improvements.

"Some time in June, it was suggested by E. F. Havens that we all take baskets on the Fourth of July, go to School Section Grove, have a good time, and pro-



perly celebrate the birthday of our national liberty. All were pleased with the idea, and each one did his best to make it a success.

"The eventful day at last arrived, and we all assembled at the grove. When the baskets were opened, Mrs. M. F. Chenney created quite a sensation by producing an immense pan of pork and beans. Others brought roast turkey, chickens, frosted cakes and other delicacies, but all these fine dishes were given the cold shoulder, each one longing for a dish of the dear old familiar, homely, baked beans.

"There were 110 persons present, men, women and children, and everyone seemed surprised that there were so many people near them, and rejoiced in the feeling that they were not alone in the boundless wilderness."

And boundless it must have seemed to the pioneer. He set his course by such things as a grassy knoll, a lone tree growing on the prairie, or a grove of trees if he was lucky to have such a landmark on his course of travel. No wonder travel of the early settlers pretty much followed the paths made much earlier by the buffalo herds and other wild animals, holding for the most part to the highest ground.

The wetness and impassability of the land in this area in the 1850's is reflected in accounts of how settlers to the south of us followed a route

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DOROTHY GILLETT

from Danville to Paxton, to Oliver's Grove south of Chatsworth, to Pontiac, to Ottawa, and finally, to Chicago. This circuitous route was used partly from consideration of the rivers and terrain, and also because of the accessibility or lack of it, of accommodations along the way. Sometimes just the building of a home would change the route.

#### CATTLE DRIVE

In 1853, a group of men decided to drive some 300 head of cattle from Ten Mile Grove in Patton Township to market in Chicago. They decided not to go the old trail by way of Ottawa and took the more direct route by way of Kankakee. Arriving at the Kankakee River, they undertook to ford it. A mile up the river was a bridge, but the owners of the cattle, in order to save the toll, had directed the young men to avoid crossing at the bridge. The cattle plunged into the river and soon the entire drove was swimming in a circle in the middle of the river. In a short time they would certainly have drowned, but dashing in on horseback, the men separated a large ox from the drove, and swimming their horses, they directed this leader of the herd across the river. Looking back, they discovered the rest swimming after them, and

soon the entire lot were grazing on the north bank of the river.

Arriving in the city of Chicago, they found they had overstocked the market by such a large drove, and were obliged to bring 100 head back again.

#### PRAIRIE BOTH FRIEND AND FOE

There are many indications in early writings that the prairie was both friend and foe to the early settlers. This description of the prairie is given in "Illinois 1837":

*"The grass which covers the prairies in great abundance is tall, and coarse in appearance. In the early stages of its growth, it resembles young wheat; and in this state furnishes succulent and rich food for cattle. Cattle and horses, that have lived unsheltered and without fodder through the winter and in the spring, scarcely able to mount a hillock through leanness and weakness, when feeding on this grass, are transformed to a healthy and sleek appearance, as if by a charm."*

*"From May to October, the prairies are covered with tall grass and flower-producing weeds. In June and July, they seem like an ocean of flowers of various hues waving to the breezes which sweep over them. The numerous tall flowering shrubs and vegetables which grow luxuriantly over these plains, present a striking and delightful appearance."*

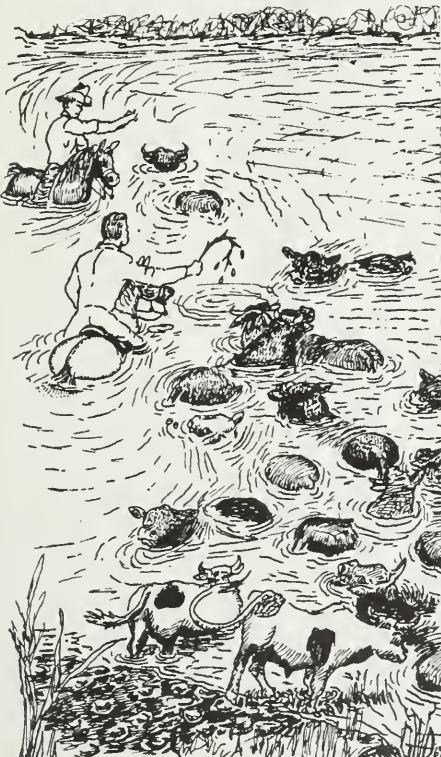
Badgers and wolves were among the unwelcome wild animals that abounded in the swamps and they seemed especially thick around what is now called Sand Ridge, but was referred to then as Mount Thunder.

Miss Nora O'Mara can recall her family tell of the wolves coming right up to the houses and sometimes at night they would look in the windows at the candle-lit room. Her grandfather, Peter Gallahue, arrived here in March, 1869.

Another hazard that beset the early settlers were the prairie rattlers that infested the swamps until cultivation drove them out. The men killed them with shovels, hoes, pitchforks or anything that came to hand. The men wore high boots for protection and they often wrapped the legs of their horses to protect them from this danger.

On the other hand, wild game and wild fowl for the table were always in abundance, right at the doorstop. Prairie chicken, quail, wild geese and ducks were so plentiful that hunters came from as far away as Chicago for the sport of hunting here.

In the early days deer roamed the area, but according to John R. Lewis' History of the Pan Handle, a great prairie fire occurred in September, 1856, and burned for months. This fire swept from the Illinois Central tracks west to Indian timber and north to the Kankakee River. He credits this fire with causing ponds and basins where there were none before, and reported the deer were never so plentiful after that.



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### EARLY CHURCH HISTORY

From the beginning, our pioneer ancestors seemed to feel a deep need to establish churches and to gather together for prayer meetings and to seek the comfort and divine guidance of God.

Even before any of the churches were organized, the Protestant settlers met together in the homes for "Bible discussion."

Sunday school in the northern township was held at the homes of Archibald McKinney, Robert Hall and others. Mr. Hall was superintendent and Mr. McKinney taught the Bible class. He was considered the spiritual leader and was like a pastor to many.

As a rule Sunday was strictly observed by the entire settlement and it was a rare thing to see anyone doing any work on that day according to the 1884 Atlas.

The United Presbyterian Church was organized on May 14, 1867 with a membership of 32. William Thompson, who came here from Monmouth in 1863, was considered the pioneer of the United Presbyterian Church. R. N. Thompson and James W. Holmes were the first elders. This little church thrived for many years but disbanded in 1922.

This church is not to be confused with the present United Presbyterian Church which when organized in 1862 was the Brenton Presbyterian

Church and later became the First Presbyterian Church of Piper City. In 1958, upon the national merger of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. with the United Presbyterian Church, the Piper City church became the First United Presbyterian Church of Piper City.

Organized September 19, 1862, it is the oldest Piper City church still in existence. The first ruling elders were Archibald McKinney, Robert Hall and M. H. Hall. John McKinney and Henry Atwood were made deacons at the first meeting.

### MET IN PIONEER HOMES

Elizabeth Pope Brown at the time of the dedication of the new kitchen and dining room of the Presbyterian Church in 1908, wrote of some of her early recollections:

*"The new kitchen and dining room should be considered living monuments to the struggles and sacrifices of the early pioneers; our dear fathers and mothers whose prayers were heard, and who formed that small body gathered in a prayer meeting in dear old Father McKinney's home. This large family with ours (Pope's) would fill our small rooms. I cannot remember the date of that first gathering in prayer, neither does it matter — early in '58 — perhaps in '57 — or it might have been earlier."*

*I well know we had been on the prairie long enough to be very hungry for someone to propound the gospel truths. The few who gathered were very willing to listen to Father McKinney in his wholehearted, good spirited way, lay out the way of salvation, and to me it was the first awakening of a bright and beautiful life."*

Perhaps her letter speaks for the Christians of all faiths who served God and each other as best they could in a strange and new environment.

In 1904 the Second Presbyterian Church of South Brenton was organized with 32 members. It was located six miles southwest of Piper City. The first elders were Jacob Ehresman, Frank Stadler and Elmer Huttenburg. It was dissolved in 1925.

Rev. W. C. Neely was the first pastor of the Presbyterian Church and began his duties here May 1, 1868 and served for 20 years. Under his pastorate in 1873, the first church was erected with a mortgage of \$625. This church was remodeled and a kitchen and dining room added in 1908. On January 22, 1913, it burned to the ground with very little saved other than a piano, organ and a few chairs.

On April 19, 1914, just a little over a year later, the fine brick church standing today, was dedicated. This church had a fine pipe organ, stained glass windows, a belfry and a bell, several Sunday School rooms as well as a kitchen and dining room.

Although the mortgage on the first church was

only paid off with money from the fire insurance, the disaster of the fire so challenged and united this congregation that when the new church was built it was mortgage free. The Ladies Aid pledged \$3,000 to be paid in two years and raised \$2,000 the first year.

Mission work has been an important part of the Presbyterian church's outreach and under the pastorate of Rev. Samuel Johnson, the church gave as much to missions as to its own budget. It was under Rev. W. Z. Allen that the Presbyterians began the support of Miss Lena Fay Froese, who served as a missionary in India, arriving there the day before Christmas, 1920. She was there until her retirement from the mission field in 1958. At first the Piper City church furnished her whole support, but during the depression years of the 1930's a church in Pasadena, California, helped with her support.

#### **METHODIST CHURCH ORGANIZED IN 1867**

The Methodist Episcopal Church was organized in October 1867 and among the first members were Mr. and Mrs. Campbell, Mr. and Mrs. D. E. Middleton, Dr. and Mrs. Burchard and Mr. and Mrs. George Spera.

The Piper City Circuit at this time embraced Piper City; Mount Zion School, seven miles southwest; Mount Thunder School, seven miles northeast. Mount Thunder soon became known as Sand Ridge.

In 1874 the school house in Piper City was purchased and moved to the site of the present United Methodist Church. Up until this time they had been worshiping in Clark's Hall, paying an annual rent of \$50. Clark's Hall was apparently used by all denominations in the early days before any of the churches were built.

During the pastorate of Rev. E. B. Bogges, in the year 1881, the old school house they had been using for a church was sold for \$150 and plans were made to build a new church. Nicholas Sherman, Ira Hand, L. B. Kiblinger and William White were appointed to make the plans. They, with other elders of the church, proceeded to the bank and borrowed \$1,200, the necessary amount to begin operations, and secured it with their note. The total cost of the new church was \$2,582.66 and it was dedicated November 6, 1881.

Sand Ridge Chapel was always closely affiliated with the Piper City Methodist Church and they shared pastors for many years. The church at Ridge Chapel was built at a cost of \$1,500 during the pastorate of Rev. A. M. Lumpkin who was here from 1890 to 1892.

"Sand Ridge Day" was a tradition for many years and the Piper City Journal carries this account of the 4th annual event held July 25, 1901, at the home of Mr. and Mrs. John Weakman:

*"The lot and barn yard were filled with teams and buggies while hitching room was at a premium. The lawn was decorated with torches and Chinese lanterns. Opperman's Piper Band discoursed its sweetest strains. The program included a violin solo by Miss Estella Woodruff, songs by Jennie and Lottie Thompson and Leota DeMoure, a duet by Misses Edna Read and Mable Hill, and a reading by Ethel Read."*

On June 6, 1954, the last service was held in the Ridge Chapel Church, after serving the community for over 60 years. The land on which this church stood was given by Arby Read. The first trustees of the church were John Weakman, Sr., Thomas Read, Arby Read and Henry Pettys. The first stewards were John McKinney, Charles Read, Henry Pettys and William DeMoure.

The first wedding to be solemnized in the church was that of Hill Dickey and Addie Pettys. Within a year Mr. Dickey died and his was the first funeral.

#### **METHODIST CHURCH REMODELED**

In 1941 under the pastorate of Rev. C. P. Brunner the first plans for remodeling the Piper City Methodist Church were made. In 1944 the building fund was reactivated under the pastorate of Rev. Merwyn L. Johnson. Clifford Orr was elected to go ahead with plans for remodeling after \$7,659.50 was pledged.

By October 1948, \$23,722 was raised, and the resulting building contained three times as much floor space as before with additional Sunday School rooms, a modern kitchen and rest rooms. The remodeled church was dedicated February 20, 1949.

Through the merger in 1940 of several branches of the Methodist church and the union of the Evangelical United Brethren and Methodist Churches in 1968, the present United Methodist Church came into being.

#### **CATHOLIC CHURCH**

John Sauerbier made this observation at the time of the celebration of the 75th anniversary of St. Peter's Catholic Church in November, 1962:

*"If we are celebrating a 75th anniversary this month it isn't because the Faith in this area is that young, nor that the church building is that old. It was in November 1887 that the Most Reverend John Lancaster Spaulding, D.D., first Bishop of Peoria raised Piper City to the rank and dignity of a parish under the patronage of St. Peter. He appointed Reverend D. L. Crowe as our first pastor, and gave us St. John's in Cullom as a mission of Piper City."*

Father Fanning of Chenoa was the nearest in



*St. Peter's Catholic Church*



ST. PETERS DEDICATED IN 1917



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OLD SOUTH BRENTON CHURCH



Piper City Methodist Church

Centennial Year (1867-1967)

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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**PIPER CITY**

**IN THEIR 100th YEAR**



**“Progress Together”**

**Seed Corn -- Seed Grains -- Field Seeds**

the earliest days to serve families in this area. A few years later Sts. Peter and Paul's parish of Chatsworth came into existence and its pastors, in effect, served Piper City's Catholic families.

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was first offered up on the second floor of what is now the City Grocery, or Clark's Hall as it was called then.

In 1880 Matthew Soran went to Chicago and purchased the site for the Catholic Church from Samuel Cross. Because he was anxious to have his family worship closer to home, he made a gift of the site to the church. He also purchased the lumber for the church building in Chicago and secured it by his own note until such time as the church could pay it off.

The first Catholic Church, a wooden structure 66 by 32 feet, was built in 1881.

The story is told that the one who was the largest subscriber to the church fund would have the privilege of naming the church and that Peter Gallahue earned this privilege. It is not surprising that the new church was named, "St. Peter's."

Many others gave generously and on July 4, 1881, the women of the church gave a dinner for the benefit of the new building which netted \$240. In September of the same year they held a fair in Clark's Hall which netted \$1,300.

By about 1915 the old wooden church was being outgrown by the growing parish and it was moved back off the site where parishioners continued to worship while a new brick church was being built. This church which still stands today was dedicated Tuesday, July 10, 1917. Rev. M. O'Conner was the pastor from 1916 to 1918.

After services were being held in the new church the old church was used for a time for basketball games and community activities.

St. Peter's parish had the honor of having their pastor, Rev. Aloysius Selva, raised to the rank of Monsignor while serving here. This very impressive ceremony occurred November 4, 1931, after the Right Rev. Selva had served 13 of his 14 years in Piper City. His was the longest tenure of any priest in Piper City.

Three young people from St. Peter's parish have gone into full time service to their church. They are Rev. Louis Dougherty, son of Mr. and Mrs. John B. Dougherty; Sister Elizabeth Ann of the Franciscan Sisters, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John Miller, and Sister Sharon Rose, Our Lady of Victory missionary, is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. L. E. Eshleman.

#### TOWNSHIPS ORGANIZED

Both Brenton and Pella Townships, originally were a part of Stockton, and from 1861, when

Brenton was organized, up to 1870, Pella was a part of Brenton.

With its organization as a Township, Pella became the youngest of the townships in Ford County.

The 1884 Atlas says that Pella was unfavorably located for early settlements, on account of its being mostly a low, level prairie, and exceedingly wet except in the driest times of the year. The Vermillion swamps extend across the northern part of the township, the South Fork of the North Vermillion River, a slow, sluggish stream, flows across the center, and various marshes and sloughs are scattered over the township, and much of the land was long regarded as irreclaimable. But of late years many Irish families have moved in and bought the wet lands, and at once began the work of ditching and tile draining, and such other changes made as warrants the belief that Pella will soon rank as one of the best townships in the county.

The first settler of this township was Robert Hall, who bought land in Section 16 and 28; he came in 1857. The next settler was Henry Atwood, who settled on the southwest quarter of Section 22. Henry Mitchison came the same year and settled on the northwest quarter of Section 22.

The first marriage in Pella was that of Henry Atwood and Mary Wylie. She came by train from Vermont to Onarga where he met her and they were married by W. P. Pearson in Onarga, November 16, 1859.

#### "THE SLOUGH"

Piper City was so wet in the early days that part of it was referred to as "the slough" and many people expected to have their homes flooded every spring.

The water followed a course entering town at the southwest edge back of Mrs. Emory Harford's following an easterly course past the Standard Service Station and the Presbyterian Church and out of town at the northeast edge. This was the site where the old slaughter house used to be in the days when meat was practically all home butchered and sold direct by the butcher and his wife to their customers.

A storm sewer of 30 inch pipe was laid in 1960 and this has completely prevented the usual flooding that took place periodically before. In retrospect it is hard to understand why it wasn't done sooner.

One of the earliest tasks of the farmers was to drain the soil so that it could be farmed at all. At first small ditches were dug with teams of horses and slip scrapers and as soon as a ditch was made,



A part of Piper City was referred to as the slough and some of the streets were flooded almost every spring until the storm sewer was laid in 1960.

tiling was begun. Many, many hours of arduous work went into the drainage of land in this area. As more and more tile drained more and more of the land, it became necessary to make the ditches bigger so that they could carry off this excess water.

In 1900 the Vermilion special drainage district had ditches cleaned and built and repaired bridges. For this they paid \$3.00 per day for man and team, \$1.50 and \$2 for a man alone. Commissioners were L. T. Bishop, J. W. F. De Moure and William Dancey.

#### STERNBERG CHANGES DRAINAGE PICTURE

This way of clearing ditches and improving the drainage of the fertile soil looked rather old-fashioned after the advent of the W. F. Sternberg Company, drainage contractors in 1917.

Promoted as "big brother to agricultural interests," Mr. Sternberg's modern equipment and methods did indeed extend the productivity of the land and bring in a new era of farm prosperity.

By 1929, the company had grown to the place where it was recognized as the largest and most dependable drainage contracting concern in cen-

tral Illinois. In its first year it had excavated 22 miles of main line open drainage ditch and in 1928 it completed 71 miles of major drainage canals, together with a large amount of smaller ditch work. By 1929 the company owned six gasoline driven dredging and ditching machines as well as other necessary equipment to complete the most exacting job in a satisfactory manner. Each operating unit was complete within itself, including



Ernie Walner, Les Spelbring, Gene Tucker and George Kemnetz worked on the Sternberg drainage crew.

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A LISTING OF FARM LAND DATED SEPTEMBER 1, 1883.



These big dredging machines changed the face of agriculture in the 1920's.

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**HAROLD BORK**  
&  
**DRELL STUCKEY**

FARMER DEALERS  
**PIPER CITY, ILLINOIS**



Father is proud of the car and Mother is proud of baby Dorothy. Picture shows George and Anna Montelius and other members of the family with the Montelius' second car.

camp wagons, cook houses and the usual miscellaneous equipment, that permits a complete self-sustained operation on the job, and to and from the job.

Mr. Sternberg's first wife went with him on many of these big projects throughout the central states and did the cooking for the crews of men who worked the big earth moving equipment. They built up a sizeable fortune and Mr. Sternberg was well known as a capable businessman. He was president of the State Bank for many years and was a trustee of the village board.

#### FIRST GAS STATION BUILT

In 1926, he built the modern Standard Service Station which he sold two years later to George Kemnetz who still operates it today.

This was the first station to be built in Piper City for the express purpose of selling gasoline and servicing cars. The station had three "positive measure" pumps. The hydraulic lift made it quicker and more efficient to change the crank case oil and lubricate the ever growing number of cars.

By this time it was obvious the car was here to stay. It had been over 20 years since George D.

Montelius had gone to Chicago and purchased a Studebaker touring car, the very first one to be owned and driven by a Piper Cityan. Bringing the car from Chicago took three days. A mechanic accompanied Mr. Montelius home with the vehicle, and also some cousins from a suburb of Chicago made the memorable trip. Having learned of the imminent arrival of this new wonder of the times, a large delegation of Piper Cityans congregated at the north end of town awaiting the arrival of Mr. Montelius and his "new buggy".

Fred Kewley was the second man to be bitten by the bug and soon the craze for motoring was catching on and it was more necessary than ever to get on with the drainage of the land and to build better roads.

Many years passed before all travel could be motorized.

The early rural mail carriers, C. B. Switzer, Adolph Liebe, Ollie Johnston and others, used a car when the weather was dry, but when it rained, they hitched up a buggy, or if it was really bad, just saddled up a good old dependable horse with which to make their appointed rounds.

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## OIL ROADS USED

Some of the primary roads were oiled periodically and even though housewives hated the splatters that showed up on children's clothes and elsewhere, they didn't complain too much because it meant the only passport into town or further, and it was generally looked upon as a necessary evil of the times. Later roads were treated with gravel or blacktopped.

Len Small's term as governor of the state of Illinois is remembered for the hard roads that were built. U.S. 24, that runs a quarter of a mile south of Piper City, was built in 1924. The decision to put the new hard road there did not meet with approval of all the people by any means.

It had been expected that the new road would follow the old Corn Belt Route along the north edge of town. The Corn Belt Route was a graded road extending from Sheldon to Burlington, Iowa, and was colorfully marked with a full sized ear of corn with green husks painted on the telephone poles. Piper City was then known as the "Corn Center of the State."

This title was not a misnomer, as Piper City in the 1920's, was one of the three largest primary grain raising sections in the state. The Farmers' Grain Company in 1928 did a daily business of \$835. It was shipping 400,000 bushels of grain annually.

The same year the B. W. Cunningham Grain Company shipped 500,000 bushels of grain and both were thriving, prosperous businesses.

May 12, 1912  
Art Cook's Well Machine  
Gullion, Ill.



Artesian wells furnished most of the water for men and beasts in the early days, but early in 1900 Mrs. George Kemnetz' father, Art Cook, used this rig to dig many wells in this area.



This picture was taken May 13, 1910 of the Mount Mellick Club at the home of Mrs. Jacob Spera. Mrs. Erskine, who got the whole thing started, is standing on the sidewalk in second row in white blouse with woman at her left in black blouse. Mrs. John A. Montelius Sr. is immediately behind her.

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## HARD ROAD USHERS IN NEW ERA

But to get back to the matter of where the hard road was going to go, the citizenry of Piper City was encouraged, when in 1922, the state sent its surveyors to survey the Corn Belt Route and it was reported in the Piper City Journal that it appeared to be the intention of the state to stay on the north side of the T. P. & W.

However, when the townspeople learned that U.S. 24 was going to bypass Piper City and go a quarter of a mile south of town, the businessmen were "up in arms" and W. F. Sternberg led a contingent of 75 to Kankakee where they pleaded their case to Governor Small, himself. It proved to no avail and plans proceeded as they were set. A few years later Illinois 115 did, indeed pass through the village running in a north and south direction. This road never carried the amount of traffic that passed over U.S. 24.

## IT WAS A LONELY LIFE

Before the advent of the hard roads, the days and years were often fraught with loneliness, especially for the women who lived on the farms, but they kept very busy. If we were to visit a pioneer home it would seem very odd to us, no doubt. Usually the homes were small with only weatherboard on the outside, with no lathes or plaster on the inside. Sometimes the only rugs were rag rugs made by hand, and the homemaker usually made all of the clothing for the family.

To keep warm the housewife spread the floors with straw and covered it with carpeting and tacked it down at the walls. Feather beds or straw ticks were used for mattresses and everything on the farm was used in some way.

Because there were not many trees there was not much wood to burn. Coal was brought in from mining states and that helped alleviate the cold during the winter months.

The pioneers had many little forms of diversion that meant a great deal to them. Children played checkers and jackstraws, but soon they were doing their share of the work along with their elders.

Women sometimes stayed home for months or even years. Mrs. Catherine Stadler, who was called affectionately "Grandma, Stadler" by everyone, came to this area with her husband under the Homestead Act and they later purchased 80 acres of land in section 20 from the Illinois Central Railroad for \$10 an acre.

In a newspaper clipping telling of some of her reminiscences after she became an old, old lady, she recalled that in the early days she had spent 10 years of such solitude as she had never known.

For four years she had never left home. After her husband died in 1884, she raised their 10 children and supervised their 360 acre farm. This was no small job.

For a time they drove six miles to a natural spring at Oliver's Grove for water for themselves and for their stock. At first this was necessary because of a lack of equipment, but later they continued to do it because of a superstition that water from artificial wells was deadly for both man and beast.

## IT WAS "WILD AND RAW"

Mrs. J. W. DeMoure who came with her husband to the "Wilson settlement" in 1864, where her husband was superintendent of Dr. Wilson's large farm interests, once said:

*"It was wild and raw in those early days. Few have any idea of the hardships. I remember I didn't see a woman for 18 months at one time, and then Mrs. Captain Mitchison came over to see me one day just for an hour or two. It grew better with the settlement of the country, and when we moved into Piper City in 1887, we then left a well settled country and almost a section of fine, well improved land of our own."*

The women were made of strong and sensible stuff, but occasionally to break the monotony, there were Fourth of July picnics and small socials and gatherings. In the winter the churches had oyster suppers and mite society meetings. There were little musical productions and debating societies were quite popular.

## FIRST FAIR IN 1882

The first fair was put on by the Piper City Union Agricultural Board in the fall of 1882 and this grew to be an annual event that everyone looked forward to with great anticipation.

A premium list and fair book for the 10th annual fair lists these officers of the association: Joseph Burger, president; C. A. Cook, vice president; T. J. Sowers, vice president; H. S. Carpenter, secretary and Ira W. Hand, treasurer.

No intoxicating liquor was served on the fair grounds and no intoxicated person was allowed on the grounds. Races were held every afternoon, except on the opening day, with purses ranging from \$30 to \$100. Gambling on the races was against the rules of the association, but interest in the races was keen for most of the horses were owned by local people. Many races were limited to Ford County horses. The fair was closed on Friday so that the moving out could be completed on Saturday and no one would have an excuse to "break the Sabbath".

Young people came in for special consideration

## **CITIZENS BANK OF CHATSWORTH**

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## **COME TO THE PIPER CITY CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION**

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PIPER CITY FAIR SCENE IN 1910.

by the fair board. School children were admitted free on Wednesday afternoons and a two year scholarship to Wheaton College was given to any Ford County resident, between the ages of 16 and 24, who could deliver the best original oration of not less than five minutes or more than 15. There were also general school exhibits and awards for the best equestrianism for young men and young ladies under 15 years of age.

#### MANY CLASSES OF LIVESTOCK

The 1891 fair book from which this information was gathered lists a wide variety of classes in livestock. In poultry, 34 classes are listed in the regular division and over 20 in the miscellaneous, ranging from pea fowls to brown China geese.

The agriculture, horticulture and floriculture divisions also reflect the variety of vegetables and grain raised in those days. Over 40 varieties are listed with prizes of 50 cents and 25 cents offered for the best red wheat, spring wheat, white wheat, clover, flax, rye, buckwheat, millet, sugar beets, celery, pumpkins and many others.

Under miscellaneous farm products, awards were offered for the best cheese, butter, smoked

ham, comb honey, extracted honey, bees in observatory, lard, maple sugar, beeswax, soap, sorghum, hops, wool fleece and German carp fish. What a contrast to the specialized products of today's farms.

A display of leather work included a class in harness and saddlery, boots and shoes, and trunks and travel bags.

The women could vie for prizes and glory in the domestic arts classes where they could show their skill in the culinary or needlework divisions.

There were no lights at the fair ground so there was no evening program. However, in later years, at least, a good traveling dramatic company would be engaged to put on plays at the Opera House in the evenings. Children and adults saved their pennies all year to have enough to attend the show every night if possible. "Uncle Tom's Cabin" was one of the favorite productions.

There were four different fair grounds in Piper City and at least two fair associations. The last one which closed in 1917 was called the Ford County Fair Association and was held in the southwest edge of town on the land now owned by Mrs. A. W.

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**THE PIPER CITY JOURNAL**

Mitchell and Margaret Johnston, Publishers



Charles Opperman, founder of Opperman's Band.

Underwood. The first fair was held at the east edge of town where Mr. and Mrs. Otto Albrecht now live and one was held just back of the north side business district. Another site was where the school now is.

After the fair disbanded in 1917, the buildings were sold in February of 1918 for \$3,000. There was some hope that a new organization would be formed and the fair would be started again at a later date, but these hopes never materialized. The buildings were torn down or moved, the land soon was put into cultivation, and the fair was just a memory.

#### OPPERMAN'S BAND

One of the chief attractions at the annual fair was the performance of the "Opperman Band". This group was a Piper City institution for many years, entertaining at all patriotic, political, social and religious functions throughout the area. They did this without compensation other than the pleasure it gave them to share their musical talent with an appreciative audience.

Charles Opperman, the founder and director of the band, was born in Colbitz, Germany, August 23, 1857, and came to America in 1868 with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. David Opperman. They first settled near Chatsworth, moving from there to Brenton Township in 1873. After his marriage to Margaret Rehm, in 1874, they lived three and a half miles southwest of town and moved into Piper City about 1895. In 1897 he and his brothers, Ernest and August, bought out Clark's general store which they continued to operate until 1905 when he invested in a cotton plantation in Mississippi, moving there in 1907 with his family. There he remained until 1915 when ill health and a homesickness for his former home prompted him to come back to Piper City. Here he stayed until his death in 1930.

He is best remembered for his musicianship, although he was a profound lover of things of nature, and spent much of his time in the culture of trees and flowers, and even planted and tended flower beds in the railroad and village parks.

Mr. Opperman's father, David Opperman, was a vocal teacher and in 1878 became the leader of a most successful glee club. From that beginning a cornet band was organized by Charles Opperman and his brothers, August and William, under the leadership of Prof. Rebholz, in 1880. In 1887 he organized a band at Thawville. In 1894 the Opperman Piper City Band was born and it was for years one of the leading musical organizations in this section of the country.

The band played regular weekly concerts during the summer time and at various fairs, both here, and at Fairbury, Pontiac and many other places.

Four of the Opperman brothers were charter members of the band and it was later strengthened by younger members of the family. In about 1915 or 1916 it was decided that the band needed new uniforms, and since their services were generally free, they held two or three public concerts to raise money. They featured special soloists and instrumentalists. Mr. Opperman's daughter, Margaret, and Miss Irene Flessner were two of the young ladies who sang to help raise the money.

# Custom Farm Services, Inc.

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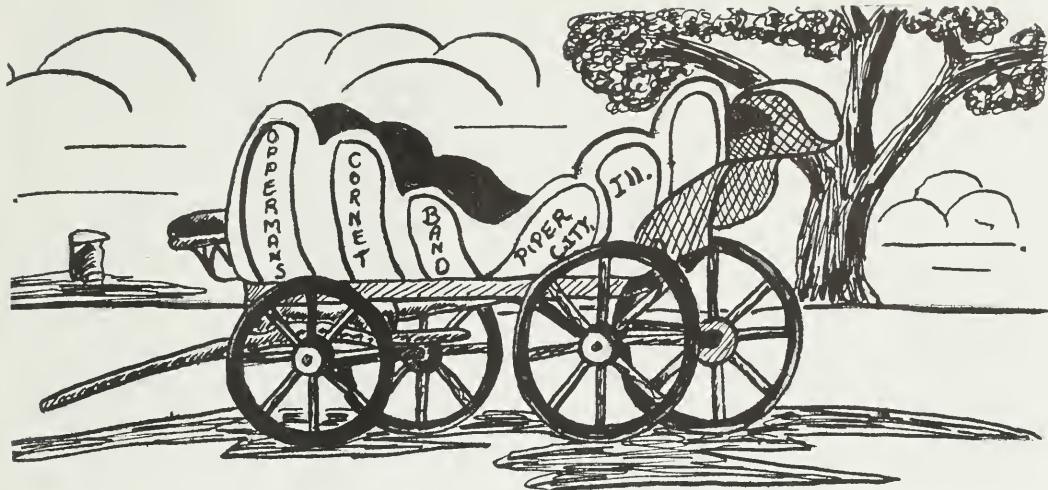
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## K's FRIENDLY MARKET



This view shows Piper City's first general store in foreground. Built in 1867 it is not much changed from the early days and has always been a grocery store. Upstairs room was used by all three churches in the early days to hold services and was later used as a band rehearsal room.



Main St. Piper City, Ill.

An interesting view of the north side business section.

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Main St. Peoria City Ill. 1905.

The carbide gas light at the far end of the street, the unpaved street and the horses and buggies date this picture at around 1900.



This scene of Peoria Ave. with the "tin Lizzies" and the paved street dates it after 1910. The State Bank building, now the home of the Journal, further dates it after 1913. Note the electric lamps instead of the gas lights as in the top picture.



A brick pavement was laid around the square in 1910 and raised Piper City's business district out of the mud. Other streets were paved in 1919.



Bird's Eye View. Piper City, Ill. 8098.

Bird's eye view of Piper City taken between 1895 when the Montelius Bank was built and 1907 when the Opera House was remodeled shows water tank in foreground where trains got their water and coal sheds near the tracks.

In the early days the band had a "bandwagon" or "chariot" with curved sides drawn by four horses, in which they used to travel to other towns. In this way they publicized the fair and other events.

### VILLAGE GROWS

In 1870 there were 307 inhabitants in Piper City and this number had grown to 750 by 1884. The little village was steadily growing and there were many signs of progress in the latter part of the 19th century.

In 1884 Piper City had a two-story school in the middle of the block on West Cross Street between Pine and Green Streets. There were four churches, a hotel, two newspapers, a bank, four general stores, two hardware stores, a lumber yard, three grain elevators, a creamery, a livery stable, an agricultural warehouse, two drugstores, two wagon shops, three blacksmith shops, and a post office.

The creamery, which was located at the east end of Walnut Street, did a big business and about 20 tons of butter were produced per year. Most of it was sold in New Orleans at 20 to 35 cents a pound. They churned four times a day in the summer and eight times a week in the colder months.

John A. Montelius, Sr., who came right after the Civil War to manage the extensive land holdings of his uncle, Dr. William Piper, was active in much of the commercial development of the village, primarily in banking and the grain business.

The first bank was established in 1870 by Charles M. Montelius and his son John A. Montelius, Sr. The bank was opened with a capital of \$50,000.

### EXCURSION TRAINS POPULAR IN 1880'S

The "excursion train" was a product of the times in the 1880's, meeting the need of the railway companies to keep their otherwise idle passenger coaches engaged in money-raising activity. Due to the rapid expansion of the railroads, many such as the Toledo, Peoria and Western Railroad Company, which had just gone through a costly reorganization, were eager to do whatever they could to make a little money.

Excursions were planned by the railroad companies to such points of interest as the State Fair in Springfield, the Rocky Mountains in Colorado, homestead sites in Nebraska, and the world's first skyscraper in Chicago. Public response was overwhelming, and many church groups and other organizations rented trains and went as a group to

see these places. It was the era of excursions.

During the middle of July, 1887, handbills were displayed prominently in Peoria and vicinity describing an excursion on the T. P. & W. to Niagara Falls scheduled to leave Peoria at 7:15 P.M., Wednesday, August 10. The price for a round trip ticket, good for up to ten days, was \$7.50 and the handbill advised that you couldn't afford to miss it.

Many people took this advice to heart, and by 6:00 P.M., that fateful night, a large crowd was already gathered on the station platform and the final preparations were being completed on the Niagara excursion train. It was made up of six Palace sleeping cars, two reclining chair cars, five day coaches, a combination baggage car, and the General Superintendent, E. N. Armstrong's official car.

As the train came to a stop, the eager excursionists rushed aboard carrying large lunch baskets, diapers, and other provisions for the small children that went aboard. There was no dining car on the train.

### GREAT TRAIN DISASTER

Little did the excursionists realize that instead of a happy trip, they were really heading for one of the greatest train disasters in history. So terrible, in fact, that the editor of the Piper City Pan Handle Advocate wrote:

*"No pen is able to describe the scene, and to do so would require human flesh for parchment, a flame of fire for a pen, and human blood for ink."*

The departure was delayed slightly by late-coming passengers. From the first, things did not go exactly as they should. After all were aboard, the two locomotives slowly pulled the train out of the station amid great bursts of waving and shouting between the people on the train and the people on the station platform.

The train crossed the bridge over the Illinois River and proceeded eastward across Illinois. After another hour's delay to repair a drawbar mishap, the train continued on its way, making a few stops to pick up additional passengers. Several got on at Fairbury. It reached Chatsworth after 11:00 P.M., about an hour and a half behind schedule. After leaving Chatsworth the engineer on the first engine opened the throttle and at last it looked like they could make up for lost time as they sped toward slumbering Piper City.

### BRIDGE BURNED OUT

Approaching a small bridge about two and a half miles west of Piper City, the engineer caught sight of a small blaze in the distance. The fireman



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ANOTHER SCENE OF TRAIN WRECK.

noticed it, too, and passed it off with a remark about section hands being more careful in burning off the weeds along the track. But the words were hardly spoken before both men realized with shock that the bridge itself was on fire and that they were headed toward it at high speed. The engineer gave a desperate pull on the whistle rope signaling "down brakes."

It was too late to stop and the first engine crossed over the bridge and ran on east up the track for some distance. The second engine leaped the chasm. The tender of the first engine became derailed and broke loose from both engines. The tender of the second engine was stripped of its trucks and landed 100 feet east of the bridge, where it was thrown into the ditch north of the tracks. The engine was dumped into the ditch on the south of the track opposite.

As soon as the second engine crossed the culvert the cars followed, and leaving their trucks in its ditch, were piled and mashed together like kindling wood. The scenes of horror and confusion that followed were frightful. There were about 700 people on the train, and of these fully one half were in the coaches that now lay in a huge mass. Seven cars filled with dead and dying people were jammed into a space of two car lengths.

The car of General Superintendent Armstrong was thrown across the track and the trucks knocked from under it. The occupants had a miraculous escape. Mr. Armstrong was thrown out of the car and escaped with a slight scratch.

The engineer of the leading engine was unhurt, but the second engineer was instantly killed with his head crushed to a pulp. His fireman jumped from the engine and was uninjured.

The accident was thought to have occurred at 11:49 P.M., since that was the time when the dead engineer's watch had stopped. Almost immediately two trainmen ran the first engine, without a tender, into Piper City for assistance. On arrival the

fire alarm was given, which at that time was done by striking the steel rim of a locomotive wheel with a sledge hammer.

Soon the town was bustling with activities and the tracks were covered with people going to the scene of the disaster. The news was telegraphed to other towns and soon help was on its way from Chatsworth.

The ladies of both places prepared places for the wounded and in short order both Chatsworth and Piper City looked like hospitals. Doctors were rushed to the scene on hand cars and were among the first to arrive.

#### FIRE THREATENS CRASH VICTIMS

The fire received the first attention of the early arrivals, for if any of the cars had caught fire the horrors of a holocaust would have been added to the already frightful disaster.

The events of that tragic night had one more ironic twist to make before the coming of the dawn. The day had been a hot and searing one, and the sun had shone down mercilessly on a parched prairie. The Peoria Daily Transcript had carried a front page story that very day on the great drouth, calling it a disaster for the farmer. The much longed for rain finally came at about 2:30 o'clock the morning of August 11. It may have been a biessing to the farmers, but to the victims of the train disaster and those working at their rescue it was the final touch of horror.

The darkness was faintly illumined by lanterns as the night was pierced with the screams of the dying and injured. The pouring rain and lightning and the roar of thunder added up to a scene that couldn't be forgotten by anyone who witnessed it.

After the wounded had been handed out of the cars and were being cared for as well as possible, the work of removing the dead began. Strong men began to take everything apart in the three

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This scene of Corn Day in Piper City shows the Opera House before it was remodeled in 1907, the new bank building on the corner and the old bank building which was moved back and was later used as the Journal office.

telescoped cars. As they progressed they came across such scenes as these described in the Piper City Pan Handle Advocate:

*Here someone would pick up a valise and uncover an arm or leg without a body, and over there someone would pick up a piece of linen to hand to the nurses and when lifted up discover a child mashed to a jelly. Such sights were common and made the bravest men shudder. Ghastly bodies of both men and women hung in grotesque fashion from the windows. In the midst of all of this horrible mixture of legs, heads, arms and mutilated bodies were to be seen frail pieces of glass and wood as good and unmarred as before the wreck. A small clock found in one car was keeping time as well as if just wound.*

*The maniacal scene became more agonizing as husband sought wife, wife, husband, father or mother, children, or children wildly clamoring for parents, while brothers, sisters, relatives and friends kept up the same frantic search, with their lost loved ones sometimes so mutilated as to be unrecognizable. The piercing shrieks of terror-stricken people suddenly bereft of those most dear to them, and under such awful circumstances, mingled with the heart-rending groans of the wounded and dying, etched the scene on the minds of those who were there.*

Piper City's two physicians were the first on the scene and worked at their mission of mercy until

completely exhausted the next day. The Opera House, the hotel and numerous private dwellings were turned into emergency quarters for the injured. Food and medicines were procured as soon as possible and all that could be done was done to alleviate the suffering. Eighty-one lost their lives that night and many more were maimed for life.

Piper City people acted with unstinting service and performed some of the most trying duties that can be required of a human being during the aftermath of the "great train wreck."

#### TRAINS BRING EXCITEMENT

It is hard to imagine the excitement of the townspeople over the arrival or departure of the trains. People came down town just to see who got on and off and it was said that Caroline (Cad) Beach met every train and was always dressed "to the teeth." She was a reporter for her father, Judge Beach's newspaper, The Pan Handle Advocate, and it was said that nothing escaped her reportorial pen.

The hotel was conveniently located just across the street from the depot and the traveling salesmen would display their wares in the lobby, and

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This hotel was torn down in 1947 to make room for Cook's IGA.

the local merchants would come there to buy. The proprietor of the hotel, about 1900, was Jim Jeffery and it was called the Jeffery House. It was sold at auction in 1906 and a modern brick building erected in its place.

Another hotel called the Central Hotel flourished after that on the corner where Cook's IGA now stands. This was the scene of many suppers and balls and was often used by the churches and civic organizations to hold their dinners or meetings. The Methodists held their Washington Birthday dinners there for many years. This hotel was in existence until after World War II, although its commercial enterprise had been on the wane for several years before that. It was torn down in 1947 to make way for the grocery store which was built by George Cook and his son, Ronald after the latter came back from service in World War II.

Certain years stand out as notable in progress and events. 1895 was one of those years as the little frontier town of Piper City began to build and improve. J. A. Montelius, Sr., made the greatest improvement by building a new brick building 40 by 80 feet. This building houses the State Bank today. A newspaper clipping describes it thus:

#### MODEL BUSINESS STRUCTURE

*"It is a model business structure, ornate in appearance and most substantial in construction. The foundation is of stone and superstructure of brick, with oolitic stone trimmings. The facing of both north and west fronts is of dark red pressed brick with terra cotta trimmings above doors and windows, and a wide expanse of plate glass, while on the street corner is a graceful tower which appropriately adorns the entire structure. The interior finish will be in keeping with its outside appearance, and when completed, which will be soon, it will have cost \$12,000. The corner room will be occupied by the Piper City Bank which will certainly have quarters unsurpassed in the county. In the rear of the bank, on the west side, Mr. Montelius, Sr., will have his grain office, which will be occupied by Mr. Montelius' sons in conducting the Agricultural Implement and wagon carriage business, the second floor being devoted entirely to wagons and carriages. An immense elevator will facilitate the handling of vehicles and machinery and render the business which is usually so laborious almost a pleasure. Mr. Montelius is entitled to highest commendations of the people of Piper City for his enterprise as well as for the evidence thus given of his faith in the future of his town. It is such manifestations of confidence which encourage future development along the same lines.*

#### MANY IMPROVEMENTS

*"But his is not the only improvement worthy of*

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mention nor the only one which renders the growth of the village remarkable. We found the Thompson Brothers occupying a large double brick store two stories in height and finished inside and outside in manner which would reflect merit on a place of many times the size of Piper City, while adjoining them on the west and constituting part of the same frontage is the jewelry store of Mr. Roberts, well stocked and equipped with the finest of furnishings. The drug stores of D. A. Boal and Dr. S. D. Culbertson, each 25 feet in width, are constructed with the same view to adornment and durability and furnished with the most modern interior fittings.

"The buildings enumerated constitute a frontage of about 165 feet, in front of which, and many other buildings, is laid about a block and a half of first class cement pavement.

"On the opposite side of the railroad is another brick building of about 27 feet frontage in which is located the new Odd Fellows' Hall which soon will be dedicated. The upper story is owned by the lodge and they can soon be congratulated upon the possession of one of the finest lodge rooms in the county and sufficient for all their needs for many years to come.

"While these are not all the improvements of the season, they are the principal ones, and when the electric light plant, which is now in the course of construction, is completed, Piper City will have taken a step in advance of which will make the season of 1895 memorable in her history."

#### ELECTRIC LIGHT PLANT

The electric light plant was built by A. A. Blair and later sold to Dave and Charles White and Otto DeMoure. This was quite a progressive step for the village and constituted a big job for the owners of the plant, as they had to wire the homes of their customers before they could sell them electricity.

The generator for the plant, which stood on the north side of Peoria Avenue across from what is now Cook's IGA, was run with steam engines and boilers to provide the electricity. They also ran a line to Chatsworth and supplied them with electricity for a time.

It was some time later that electric street lights were installed. The village board was very frugal with the use of electricity and at one of their board meetings in 1900 they considered not turning on the lights on bright moonlight nights.

#### FLAX, A POPULAR CROP

Flax was a popular crop with early farmers in this area because it helped to prepare the sod for cultivation. There was a flax mill in Jeffery's pasture at the south edge of town near where Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Pearson now live.

Sorghum mills were rather plentiful and there were evidently several plants that took the sorghum grown by local farmers and made rich, brown sorghum molasses. This was an important staple

in the pioneer's diet and many a table was set with nothing but corn bread and molasses. There was a sorghum mill about where the Custom Farm Services fertilizer plant is now located. This mill was run by Mr. McLaughlin.

There also was a mill across from L. T. Bishop's, or where the Edwin Bork family now lives, and one north of town operated by "Molasses" Koerner.

Children used to follow the wagons hauling molasses cane into town, chewing on the sweet stalks that fell to the ground.

An ice plant was an important addition to the early business section and there was probably more than one ice house during the early history of the town.

Nels Plank operated an ice house for many years. They used to cut ice out of ponds in the winter and store it for the summer. There was a pond north of Robert Dehm's residence where they used to harvest ice. Ice, like other crops, was harvested when it was ready, and it was considered ready when it was eight inches thick.

#### TURN OF THE CENTURY

The turn of the century was ushered in with great plans by Piper Cityans to build a new \$12,000 schoolhouse on a new site at the south edge of town. To be forever left behind was the cramped two-story frame school, heated by space heaters in winter, and poorly ventilated in summer.

Gone, too, was the three-year high school that had seemed more than adequate for the children of the pioneers up to this time.

The new brick two-story school was the pride of the citizenry, and furnished large and comfortable class rooms for all grades from first through high school.

On August 27, 1900, the cornerstone to the new school house was dedicated in an impressive exercise in which almost all the townspeople took part. The exercises were under the auspices of the Masonic lodge. A committee was on hand to meet Grand Master Hitchcock, who arrived on the 9:45 A.M. train. At 2:00 P.M., the procession formed at the lodge hall and marched to the schoolhouse site, headed by Opperman's Cornet Band.

The Reverend M. C. Long delivered the first address — a history of the school. Grand Master Hitchcock followed with the main oration, after which the ceremony of laying the cornerstone took place. The exercises concluded, members of the lodge, friends and patrons, returned to the lodge hall for various amusements and entertainments, and at 6:00 P.M. refreshments were served.

School started October 1 in the old building,



This school housed the grade school and a three-year high school until 1900 when a fine new brick building was built at the south edge of town.

with Miss Mary Hotzenpiller, principal; Miss Clara Bishop, assistant principal; W. G. Cook, grammer department; Miss Anna Ralston, intermediate, and Miss Lizzie Dick, primary.

After the Christmas holiday, youngsters began going to school in the new building and everyone felt very proud to think that all grades from first through high school could attend such a nice modern school.

The old school was not completely abandoned, but was used by youngsters who played basketball and other games in it. Later it was moved to the site where the Triple H Company now stands, and it was used by Mike Kelly and his sons to store implements and such. They were dealers of farm implements for many years.

One small addition was made in 1920 to the 1900 school, then in 1937 the board of education thought that it was time to enlarge the school and local people responded affirmatively by voting the referendum necessary to do it. A fine new gymnasium and several classrooms were built.

#### 1940'S BRING MANY CHANGES

The 1940's ushered in many changes for the schools. The country schools began to close one

by one and their pupils were amalgamated into the town school. This was due to the economic pressure of the rising costs of teacher's salaries and the state government's upgrading of standards. There was pressure from many groups, including the Illinois Agricultural Association, to consolidate schools and to upgrade the rural schools to a par with the town schools.

Many did not feel this way. In fact, they felt that what the country school had to offer was superior to the town school.

The trend continued, however, and the last of the country schools to close was the Crandall School.

Some of the faithful country school teachers moved into the town school system and others retired. We still have some teachers who formerly taught in the country schools. Among them are Mrs. Frank Bouhl, Mrs. Merle Harford, Mrs. Donald Schnurr, Mrs. Francis Boma and Edmund Collaray.

A bit of Americana passed from the scene with the country schools. They had been little centers of community interest, the box socials in the winter and the school picnic at the close of school



Piper City was justly proud of this fine brick school built in 1900 at a cost of \$12,000.



In 1911 the school staff looked like this. Left to right they are Miss Andrews, Miss Warrick, ..... , Miss Grafton and Mr. Dolph.



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were events that the whole family looked forward to with anticipation.

Being geared to the necessity of rural youngsters working on the farms the country school was usually in session for only eight months to the town school's nine. At the end of April, or first of May, the families of the district all gathered for a picnic dinner to mark the close of school.

After the bountiful dinner, the men and boys organized a ball game and the women exchanged recipes and visited. The highlight of the day came when the freezer of ice cream was opened in the afternoon and everyone enjoyed this rare treat. The teacher customarily furnished the ice cream out of her meager salary.

The closing of the country schools presented the problem of getting the children to town school and on August 31, 1942, some parents from north of town attended a school board meeting and asked that the school obtain a bus and see that their children got to school.

Shortly after that the school did get one bus which shuttled back and forth as best it could. Some of the students had to wait at school until the others arrived for classes.

Ben Thompson was hired as the first bus driver. The school now maintains four buses, a mini-bus and one spare bus.

The country schools were disposed of in various ways. Some were moved away and remodeled for homes. Others were bought with the idea that they would remain as community centers for the district, but this hardly ever worked out. Center School is used for a town hall and polling place by Peila Township, one of the few still used and maintained. There is hardly a recognizable country school in the area.

In the fall of 1946 two country schoolhouses were moved into town where one was used for industrial arts and the other for ag. They were used for a few years until better facilities were built.

Hot lunches were also started in the 1940's and the old dining room was the room under the stage in the gymnasium. The pleasant, well-lighted dining room in use today was built in 1952.

#### **COOPERATIVE STARTED IN 1967**

An experiment in education was begun in 1967 when Chatsworth and Piper City began the "cooperative plan." In this plan, students are bused from one school to the other and it has made a more economical teacher - pupil ratio and has given a wider choice of subjects to students.

It has been hailed by educators all over the state as "the largest cooperative in the state of

Illinois." The two superintendents who worked out the cooperative plan were Edward Gladish of Piper City and Robert Stuckey of Chatsworth. Further consolidation seems imminent in 1969, but only the future will reveal just what and how much.

Our modern school with a staff of 22 teachers and two administrators is a far cry from the first humble beginning of education begun on the prairie 110 years ago.

The first school in Brenton Township was in a small lean-to beside the home of John R. Lewis. The offer of this rude building was gladly accepted by the newly formed school trustees, as no education had been "diffused" in the township up to this time. Miss Annie Hobbis of Onarga was employed as the first teacher, beginning her duties the first Monday in December, 1859 and continuing four months. Mr. Lewis also furnished the fuel for the school and boarded the teacher for the very liberal sum of \$24.

The Wagner school was one of the earliest country schools and was also used by the churches to hold meetings and socials.

#### **MANY TEACHERS SERVED**

Many Piper City teachers could qualify as outstanding and we make no attempt to name them all here, but a few stand out in length of service and devotion and we would be remiss if we failed to note their contribution to the youth of this community.

Clara May Powell was an early country school teacher who taught in the Herr School. She also organized a Sunday School there which she taught on Sundays, making her attendance at school a necessity for six days a week. This was quite a bit of devotion when we note that it was the teacher who did all the janitoring, fixed the fires, and took care of all emergencies. Once in a great while one of the school board members was called in to "settle" one of the big boys.

Anna Ralston devoted most of her life to teaching and exemplified the old-fashioned image of a school ma'arm. She wore her hair in a bun on top of her head and her mouth was drawn into a tight little knot from which very little praise ever escaped. She was there to teach, and teach she did. Many were better off for her strict discipline and devotion to learning.

Professor J. H. Francis was superintendent here for many years, retiring in 1954. Not only did he superintend both grade and high schools, but he also was a very good math teacher and made even the most unlikely pupils understand it a little better. He taught here for 36 years.

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District 35, a country school, was taught by Miss Hortense Blaine. In the back row are Nina Decker, Verda Ehresman, Gladys Blaine, Ocie Ehresman, the teacher, Mary Stuckey, Leota Decker and Angie Ehresman.

In the middle row are Herbert Zick, Roy Taylor, Kirker Hawthorne, Albert Brauman, Iona Decker and Hazel Stuckey.

In the front row are Orval Taylor, Delbert Ehresman, Vern Stuckey, Marie Zick and Delta Stuckey.



Piper City school was integrated at one time when a Negro family lived here. This is a picture of the 7th and 8th grades taken in 1921 with Miss Anna Ralston, the teacher, in the back row.

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This street scene shows the Opera House after it was remodeled.

Miss Dora Heavener was a first and second grade teacher and introduced literally hundreds of children to school. Later she became teacher of the kindergarten. She was the second kindergarten teacher. Mrs. Sylvia Guren taught the first class in the spring of 1952, then Miss Heavener started in the fall and taught kindergarten until she was forced to retire because of her health in 1962 after devoting 46 years to teaching. Piper City was one of the first schools in the area to have a full time kindergarten.

#### OPERA HOUSE

The Opera House was an institution in the early days. It superceded Clark's Hall as a center of all civic activities. The churches held suppers, musicals, and fairs in Clark's Hall in the earliest days, but everything had to be carried up the stairs and they were delighted to hold their meetings in the larger and better equipped Opera House after it was built.

Here every strata of the town's social life must have passed at some time or another. The big events of the year were the stock shows that came to town and played to an audience starved for entertainment. Basketball games were held here so all school children frequented its halls.

often and found special joy in watching the proceedings from the dark and sometimes hot and stuffy gallery. The Mogul basketball team was well known in the area before World War I and for a long time afterwards. Their fame as an independent basketball team was known all over Central Illinois and some very important "name" teams came and played the Moguls on the Opera House court.

In 1907 the Opera House was remodeled and lost its distinctive cupola that marked the early era of its architecture. It is not known just when the Opera House was first built, but we know it housed the Masonic Lodge on the second story. The Lodge was chartered in 1868.

#### FARMERS INSTITUTE

The Farmers Institute was held here for many years and besides the exhibits of grain and produce brought in by the farmers, there were all kinds of blue and red ribbons given in the culinary arts to the farmers' wives. School children submitted hand work and themes to be judged and resultant winners were published in the paper.

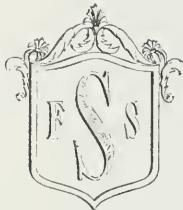
The afternoon and evening program consisted of "pieces" and songs and entertainment by school children with a "special" speaker brought

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Piper City, Illinois

in who could entertain and enlighten his farm audience.

It was a time of fun and good natured rivalry and families attended together and enjoyed mingling with other families. Usually Farmers Institute was held in February and bad weather often marred the event, although they dared not hold it any later in the spring for the mud roads became impassable after the spring thaw.

In later years dances were a regular event and some people approved and others did not. The dances usually drew a good crowd, however, and Falletti's orchestra from Kankakee was one of the most popular dance bands in the 20's and early 30's.

Other more staid events also took place in the Opera House including the senior class's graduation and the eighth grade honor night.

After the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches built dining rooms, their suppers and meetings were usually held within their own walls. And after the school built its gymnasium, the basketball games, graduation and even the alumni banquet were all held there. The Farmers Institute, like the county fair that preceded it became a thing of the past. Farmers could hear better speeches on their radio sets and certainly the entertainment was better than anything that could be mustered by local talent.

In the late 40's it became obvious that the usefulness of the old Opera House, as people had known it for many years, was a thing of the past. A group of interested citizens got together and decided to put in a bowling alley in its place and in 1947 the Opera House was razed.

#### AGRICULTURE MOST IMPORTANT INDUSTRY

Agriculture has always been the most important source of income for Piper Cityans, and even 100 years after the beginning of our town, the economy still responds to the pulse of the farm community.

One of the first businesses was the buying and selling of grain and was begun on a very small scale by Dr. William Piper and John A. Montelius, Sr. The grain was stored in a small shed in bags and then carried to the railroad tracks to be sent to market. This was started in 1866.

The Montelius family remained in the grain business until 1924 when Joseph K. Montelius sold out to Bloice W. Cunningham, completing around 60 years in the business.

When the bank building was built in 1895, the grain office was in the southwest corner with the



Another view of Corn Day.

scales on the west side, later used by Jesse Johnson as a cream station.

Since the Monteliuses owned a lot of land, especially north of town, it was natural that their tenants would bring their corn to the Montelius grain elevator to be sold.

"Corn Days" became a by-word and some time during the winter it would be agreed that a certain day would be "corn day" and all the tenants would bring their corn to the elevator that day.

It was necessary to do this in the winter time, otherwise the roads might be impassable if they were not frozen. Usually the men walked beside their wagons to keep warm and it was often a severe hardship for both man and beast. It was not unusual for the teams and wagons to be lined up from the scales to the north end of town.

Fist fights sometimes broke out between men waiting their turn to dump their corn and return on the long cold trek home.

In 1914 the Monteliuses built the large cement elevator which fronts on Green Street. At the

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**“Gas does it better – for less”**

**Northern Illinois Gas Company**



When this large cement elevator was built by the Montelius Grain Co. in 1917 it was the biggest and best in the state outside of some grain terminals.



Elevator owned by James Walsh from 1908 and later sold to Alvin Crede who sold it to Farmers Grain Co. in 1918.

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**Piper City**

**on Your**

**100<sup>TH</sup>**

**Anniversary**

**ANNE and MARTY**

**CORAL LOUNGE**

Where the fine people of Piper Meet



Shown is the Farmer's Elevator and the Electric Light Plant at around 1900 or later.  
The occasion seems to be a horse sale.



In 1904 the bronze plate with 33 names of Civil War veterans was placed on the  
soldiers and sailors monument in the village park.

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Chatsworth, Illinois

time this was considered the finest and the largest elevator in the state outside of some terminal elevators. This replaced a wood structure.

Mathew Soran, Sr., was another early grain dealer, dealing in grain as well as general merchandise at the site of the present post office. His scales were on the east side of his building.

When Bloice Cunningham bought out J. K. Montelius he leased the brick office on Main Street and the cement elevator, at first from Mr. Montelius, but later from the LaHogue Grain Company who bought Montelius out.

Mr. Cunningham was killed in an automobile accident November 22, 1938, and E. P. Wilson and his sons, John E. and Edwin E. Wilson, effected a purchase from E. H. Houk, executor of his estate, and the Wilson Grain Company formally opened for business December 2, 1938, with Edwin E. (Chub) Wilson as manager. John E. was in the First National Bank at the time.

Wilson Grain Company continued the lease with the LaHogue Grain Company for the facilities of office and elevator. The ground was leased from the railroad company.

Both John and Edwin served in World War II and while away in service the elevator was managed by their uncle, John Elmer Wilson, with E. P. Wilson assisting.

The Wilson Grain Company was one of the earliest grain companies to move into the trucking of grain on a large scale and the initial step was made through necessity. The TP&W Railroad Company was on strike and in order to move the grain to the terminals and sub-terminals it became necessary to move it by truck. This was done prior to Chub's return from service in 1946.

The LaHogue Grain Company decided to sell the office and elevator at public auction April 19, 1946. Both Farmers Grain Company and the Wilson Grain Company were spirited bidders, but Farmers Grain Company was the successful bidder and Wilson Grain Company vacated the premises about July 15, of that year.

Wilsons then moved to 17 East Peoria having contracted with J. W. Hickerson, local carpenter, to build an office and some storage space for feed. They began to go into the trucking business in earnest as they had no elevator in which to store grain. They eventually owned four trucks and sometimes supplemented with others that they hired for larger jobs.

Morris was the main market for the grain for many years, although some of it moved to Kankakee, Chicago and Gibson City as well as other points. During the 1950's Lew Walker of Gilman



The water tower built in 1913 after several disastrous fires made it easier to fight fires and also ushered in a new era of indoor plumbing.

handled a lot of corn from Piper City. Mr. Walker had prevailed on a Chicago company to build a sub-terminal at Gilman and he did his best to give a good market to his neighbors in the business.

Wilson Grain Company's direct handling of grain from farm to the market was new to Piper City and it created quite a stir, but it was not entirely without precedent in the area. Herb Sterrenberg of Crescent City had operated successfully this way for a time, and his experience was the incentive needed for Wilsons to go ahead.

This all happened back in a day when employees worked hard for their employers and a fine group of men worked long hours and hard to succeed at this new venture in grain merchandising. Sometimes Theron Boma, who operated a corn sheller at that time, would start at midnight if that's what it took to get the job done.

In 1958 Wilson Grain Company sold out to Virgil and Ray Wilkey and it became known as the Wilkey Grain Company and has been in business since with Virgil Wilkey as the manager. This grain company was sold at public auction June

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7, 1969 to Farmers Grain Company so for the first time since Piper City was started there is only one grain company in operation.

#### FARMERS GRAIN COMPANY

The Farmers Grain Company has been in operation over 50 years.

James Walsh built or acquired an elevator in 1908 at the west end of Main Street. He later sold to Alvin Wrede.

In 1917 the farmers of this area organized a Farmers Grain Company. Shares of stock totaling \$25,000 were sold at \$50 each. The first meeting of the shareholders was held February 16, 1918 in the Masonic Hall. On the first board of directors were Frank Reising, William Quick, E. E. Bishop, Baltz Weber, James P. Glass, Hugh Hawthorne, John Klehm, John Shaughnessy and J. A. Berlett.

C. T. Hupp was the first manager of Farmers Grain. In 1921 C. E. Miller was hired as a manager and served until his retirement in 1954.

Claire McClain was another individual who gave years of service to the grain business. He served as bookkeeper for Bloice Cunningham and also for the Wilson Grain Company.

#### AGRIBUSINESS

Agribusiness has grown to be a common ex-

pression in 1969 although our ancestors would not have the faintest idea what was meant by the term. Businesses related to agriculture have grown fast in the past 10 years and one well known to area farmers is the fertilizer and herbicide business. Farmers have learned how they can boost yield and control weeds and these products are much in demand.

There are two fertilizer plants in Piper City, and both have been built in the past five years. What is now Custom Farm Services, Inc., began in 1964 as Schofield Soil Service. Glenn Mogged started with them as manager and is still their manager. He recently was named top manager of his district.

Monsanto Agricultural Center was built soon after the other fertilizer plant and Lon Ash was their first manager. Howard Myers is now acting as manager. Both plants do a big business and have the confidence of the farmers as both managers are local people and have farmed.

#### F/S SERVICES, INC., SEEDS DIVISION

Another business closely aligned with agriculture and one of great importance to Piper City is F/S Services, Inc., Seeds Division. It is the largest business in Piper City. It started back in 1937 when an organization known as the Ford County

Corn Growers was carrying on a seed testing and germinating program in various parts of the county. Hybrid seed corn had just begun to catch on and farmers who had for years been saving a few bushels of their best corn for planting were beginning to buy hybrid corn.

Nobody had ever heard of a seed company. If a farmer needed seed, he bought some from his neighbor. The development of hybrid corn changed all that and the pollination and breeding of corn was no longer left to nature and chance.

Seeing the need of area farmers, it was decided at the annual meeting of the Ford County Corn Growers on January 21, 1937 to organize a Ford County Crop Improvement Association and to grow hybrid seed corn.

On May 23, 1937 the Ford County Crop Improvement Association was incorporated and A. B. Schofield was made the first business manager.

In March, 1938, it was decided that the corn processing plant would be built in Piper City. The name of the organization was then changed to Producers Crop Improvement Association and it became an important addition to the business and commercial growth of Piper City.

In April, 1939, the association planned its hybrid seed corn production at approximately 700 acres. This was the first crop processed through the Piper City plant.

L. R. Downs, present manager of the company, came to Producers upon the resignation of Mr. Schofield in January of 1940. In 1947, the Blackhawk Hybrid Seed Corn Association of Polo was merged with Producers and the company was reorganized as Producers Seed Company in April, 1949.

On February 7, 1952, a fire destroyed all the facilities at Piper City except for the office building. There was some talk, at first, about moving to a different site at another place, but local people worked very hard to persuade them to rebuild here and soon plans were being made to build the plant bigger and better than before. The new plant was approximately three times the capacity of the old one when completed a short time later.

In 1966 Producers Seed Company merged with Farm Service and it is now called F/S Services, Inc., Seed Division.

The company employs many Piper City people and it has brought in many well educated, interesting people to live in this community.

#### LOCKER PLANT

The Piper City Locker Plant was organized on a cooperative basis in September of 1943. Two

hundred and fifty-six shares of stock were sold at \$25 a share. In October of 1943 the land and building on its present site was bought from Walter Opperman. The locker was incorporated under the Agriculture Act on February 22, 1944. Clarence Pearson is the one and only manager the locker plant has ever had.

The first officers of the locker plant were George Ficklin, president; W. R. Crandall, vice president and W. F. Weber, secretary and treasurer.

In 1969 the future of the locker plant looks a bit dubious. Almost all the locker plants in the area have closed due to stricter regulations by state and national government.

#### HENALD'S MANUFACTURING CO.

Piper City's only factory, The Henald Manufacturing Company, was begun September 27, 1954. Previously it had been located at St. Anne. The factory was begun in the back room of what was then the David's Economy grocery store and is now the Overacker Show Room. The employment rose from eight to 50 before it was moved to its present site in February, 1956. At the present time about 100 are employed. Sometimes employment has reached almost 250. Transformers for radio and television are produced here. Chester Kraft, Watseka, is the present manager.

#### PIPER CITY JOURNAL

The Piper City Journal is the oldest Piper City business to have remained in continuous operation under the same name. At its beginning in 1897, it had competition in another newspaper called the Pan-Handle Advocate which was edited by Judge H. P. Beach.

The Journal was founded in 1897 by B. W. Kinsey and continued under his management until May 14, 1900, when it was bought by E. S. Pike of Chenoa. Charles E. Gilpin moved to Piper City from Windsor and was in charge of business and editorial management under Mr. Pike. Later that same year, Mr. Gilpin bought the Journal and continued as its editor until his death in 1937 when his daughter, Mrs. George Perry, took over and was editor until May 1, 1966. The Journal was then purchased by Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell Johnston who still publish it once a week on Thursdays.

Another early newspaper was the Piper City Advertiser edited by Richard Alnutt and begun in 1876. The Advertiser went out of existence some time between 1885 and 1900.

#### EMORY HARFORD AND SONS

Emory Harford and Sons is a business of long



One way of advertising the fair was to load your family and friends into a wagon and tour the countryside. Fred Walle is man in front.



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**PIPER CITY**

**in Their Observance of**

**A Century of Progress**

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**May the Next 100 Years Be  
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FORD COUNTY AND ADJACENT COUNTIES OF EAST CENTRAL ILLINOIS**

standing in Piper City. It still carries on business under this name even though Mr. Harford died in 1967.

Emory Harford came to this area from West Virginia in 1912. He engaged in blacksmithing at the Dennenwitz blacksmith shop in South Brenton. When he was married in 1916, he built a shop at the west end of Main Street which is still the site of the business, although needless to say, there is no more blacksmithing done there.

In 1931, Mr. Harford added an implement line and after World War II his sons, Merle, Donald and Wayne came in with him to run the implement company and Harford's Oil Co.

#### **PIPER CITY LANES**

Piper City Lanes is the only business in Piper City to offer recreation or diversion. There have been movie theaters and pool halls, but at the present time the bowling alley is the only business of its kind. It is a nice modern center used by young and old.

In 1947 when the old Opera House was to be torn down, six men formed a board of directors in order to build a bowling alley on the site with Piper Lodge 608 A. F. & A. M. using the second floor for its lodge hall.

The directors were Jesse McKee, P. L. Kelly, Dr. C. E. Branch, Fred Weakman, Dr. W. G. Raudabaugh, J. J. Lyons and R. R. Roberts. Officers elected were Dr. Branch, president; Kelly, vice president; Lyons, secretary and Dr. Raudabaugh, treasurer.

In 1967, Mr. and Mrs. Howard Myers, who had been managing the alleys for the past 11 years, bought out the business from the board of directors.

#### **FOXY'S TELEVISION SERVICE**

Mr. and Mrs. Reynard L. (Foxy) Hayslette were for many years associated with the restaurant business in Piper City and ran Foxy's Corner Cafe on the north side.

In the 1950's, Mr. Hayslette began to branch out by working at repairing television and radio sets and in 1961 they sold their restaurant and he concentrated on selling and repairing television sets.

Mr. and Mrs. Hayslette have been very generous in catering for churches and organizations as well as individual parties and dinners since retiring from the restaurant business. They do much of this without charge whether they are affiliated with the church or organization, or not. This has been an appreciated and worthwhile service to the community.

#### **HOME GUARANTY**

The Piper City Home Guaranty Savings Association began business in 1956 with a state charter and occupied the building the State Bank is now in.

On March 9, 1959, the Federal Home Loan Board granted federal insurance which was an important step in the growth of the Association.

They had offices in the Eugene E. Doran building for a time and in January, 1963, they moved into their new building at 116 South Pine Street.

The original board of directors was made up of Howard Stuckey, Samuel Martin, C. E. Miller, L. E. Overacker, Harald Hemb, Karl Kieismeier and R. F. Goodyear. The first officers were Stuckey, president; Martin, vice president and Miller, secretary.

Stuckey and Martin are present president and vice president of the Association. J. H. Francis is the present secretary and treasurer.

Mrs. Howard Stuckey was the office secretary from 1956 until April of 1969, when Drell Stuckey became office manager upon her retirement.

#### **L. E. OVERACKER**

L. E. Overacker has been a Piper City businessman for about 40 years. He started as a mechanic at the age of 18, working for D. B. O'Donnell at the Central Motor Co. He also worked for Gus Zarbuck, Carl Lemons and others.

Mr. Overacker bought out Aloise (Alley) Reising at the present site of Overacker, Inc. in 1930. J. W. Holmes is now the president and manager of this enterprise.

Mr. Overacker has been a Pontiac dealer since 1935 and has a large show room on Main Street. He also has had the agency for the Chicago Motor Club for 35 years.

He has lived during an era when selling cars and servicing them was one of the biggest businesses in a small town, and each town had several car dealers and garages, not to mention gas stations.

#### **PEOPLES COAL AND LUMBER COMPANY**

Since 1867 there has been a lumber company on the corner where Peoples Coal and Lumber Company now stands.

The business was started by John A. Montelius, Sr. and Dr. Piper and employed John McKinney. In a year or two, Mr. McKinney bought out his employers and for over 60 years the lumber business was in the hands of the McKinney family. The first business under their ownership was John McKinney and Brothers. In the beginning the company handled lumber and a little hardware. Later furniture and undertaking were added.

The business later passed into the management

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**CLOOS BODY SHOP**

Piper City, Illinois

Wrecks Rebuilt and Refinished  
DUANE CLOOS, Proprietor

of Mr. McKinney's son, W. O. McKinney, and became known as W. O. McKinney & Company. Besides lumber, they stocked tile, gravel, sand, concrete building blocks, fence posts and other items reflecting the needs of the times.

H. G. Flessner was the manager for the McKinneys for many years and later for the Miller Lumber Company. The business was owned for a short time by "Red" Hubert of Bondville and in 1945 was sold to Peoples Coal and Lumber Company. They have branch offices in Watska, Kentland, Indiana and Grant Park. Ray Martin, who worked for the company for the past 14 years, has been manager for the past three years. Managers before him were Ersle Quick and Ray Wilkey.

#### **BRADBURY AND COMPANY**

R. E. Bradbury, now retired, was a farmer between Piper City and Roberts who began plumbing around 1918, as a side line to his farming, one of the earliest farmers to do this. He had always been inventive and ingenious about fixing and repairing things. He had kept the country telephone lines in working order and had also patented an umbrella holder for tractors.

His son Herb started with him in 1925 and worked for just 25 cents an hour. They built the modern brick shop on Main Street in 1946 and Mrs. Madge Ristow has worked in their office since 1947.

Herb's son, Ronald Bradbury, has been an apprentice for the past four years and since getting out of service has been actively engaged in the work with his father for the past year.

#### **RHODE MOTORS, INC.**

Harold Rhode came to Piper City November 1, 1945, and opened an implement store in the bank building. He moved to the north side in the shop now occupied by L. A. Reynolds in January of 1947.

In May, 1953, he bought out the Joe Holmes car agency and for a time ran both places. In March, 1954, he sold the implement agency and has since been in business at 27 W. Main, where he sells and services cars. His son, Floyd, is associated with him.

#### **TRIPLE "H" CO., INC.**

Mr. and Mrs. Warren Hanna became affiliated with the Triple "H" Company in 1958 as wholesale distributors of allied farm equipment with a warehouse in Piper City.

Mrs. Hanna has been carrying on the business since Mr. Hanna's death in 1968 and employs Mrs. Andrew Froelich Jr. in the office. She has three

salesmen who visit dealers in the three states of Illinois, Indiana and Missouri.

Triple "H" has been at its present location of 222 South Green since the early 60's. They incorporated in 1964.

#### **SORAN'S CAFE**

M. J. (Jim) and Vera Soran have operated Soran's Cafe for about 25 years. The combination of Mrs. Soran as the "perfect cook" and Mr. Soran as the "perfect host" has been hard to beat and they have a large clientele of local and out of town diners who look forward to dining at Soran's. Their Harvest Room is much in demand for wedding receptions, luncheons and meetings.

The Sorans also combine two pioneer families. She was Vera Bishop before her marriage and is a granddaughter of the L. T. Bishops, one of the earliest farm families to settle here. Mr. Bishop arrived here from New York in 1858. Mr. Soran is a grandson of M. J. Soran, Sr., who arrived here in 1870.

#### **TAVERNS**

Piper City was "dry" for many years and the only way you could buy liquor in town was at the Drug Store with a doctor's prescription. There are now two taverns in operation. Citizens voted to go "wet" shortly after prohibition was repealed.

Pat's Tap on the north side is owned and operated by Malcolm (Pat) Lionberger. The Office is owned and managed by Mrs. Ruth Fagan, who has been running the business by herself since the death of her husband, Jack Fagan, in 1966.

There are a few stories that have been passed down about the good old days when Piper was dry and Chatsworth wet. It is told that many Piper City men got on the evening train to go to Chatsworth and then came back on a late evening one, and almost all of the returning townsmen would be carrying a shoe box. Of course, it was pointed out that they could not be buying a pair of shoes every night.

Then there was the man who got in the barber chair to be shaved. When the barber was just half done, the train, bound for Chatsworth, tooted into town. The man jumped out of the chair, wiped off his face and said he'd be back in the morning for the rest of his shave.

#### **FUNERAL DIRECTOR**

Justin K. Reilly is the present funeral director in Piper City, having bought out the business in 1951 following the death of Ernest H. Houk. He and Mrs. Reilly and their three children lived in Piper City until his father retired as funeral direc-



**E. H. Houk was a funeral director here for over 41 years.**

tor in Gilman. The Reillys then moved to Gilman, but continued to operate the Reilly Funeral Home in Piper City. Mr. and Mrs. James Gilvin are the occupants of the home at the present time.

Mr. Houk had been Piper City's funeral director for 41 years. In 1910 he began his mercantile career by working for W. O. McKinney and Daniel Kewley. Mr. McKinney was the funeral director and was also in the lumber business. In 1915 Mr. Houk bought out his employers and was launched on a long and successful career in the furniture business. He also was a dignified and efficient funeral director, kind and sympathetic.

He kept pace with the times and in 1929 was operating a Studebaker DeLuxe Motor Funeral Coach and Ambulance.

In the early days, perhaps a bit before Mr. Houk's time, Fred Ristow had a team of matched black horses that he used to pull the hearse to the cemetery. They were trained to walk very slow and when he drove by the men would remove their hats and stand bare headed in respect to the dead, a contrast to our modern motorized corteges that are hardly noticed unless they interrupt the flow of traffic.

#### **CITY GROCERY**

The City Grocery has perhaps the longest history of any Piper City business. Certainly the building is the oldest and most colorful. It was built in about 1867 and housed a general store operated by John A. Montelius, Sr., who took grain and farm products in exchange for items in his store.

When the dress patterns came in, the women would first lay the pattern on the material to see how much "goods" it would take. They often cut the pattern out right in the store and by this simple

little routine savored the pleasure of the new garment for several minutes where others might see and perhaps envy them a bit.

Mrs. Montelius worked in her husband's store and made millinery for the ladies.

In 1876 John Clark, from the very interesting Clark family that had come here from Patterson, New Jersey in 1867, purchased the store from Mr. Montelius.

The Clarks were strong believers in education and their children attended Wabash College at Crawfordsville, Indiana. One son, Alexander, was a railway attorney and worked out of Chicago until his tragic death, of a heart attack, in an Evanston station; another son, William J. Clark, worked with a Grain Company in Chicago, but came back to Piper City at the death of John in 1885, after which he ran the general store, sometimes with the help of others.

A daughter, Maggie, a teacher in the local high school, married Ammon Coomes, a high school principal, who stayed here for several terms in about 1880. The Coomes moved to Paxton, where they established Coomes Drug Store.

It was during the time that the Clarks were the proprietors of the store that Clark's Hall became the meeting place for all kinds of functions and gatherings. The churches met here and this was where the dinners and socials were held. It was the forerunner of the Opera House.

Early history is sprinkled with many references to Clark's Hall which was on the second story of what is now the City Grocery.

The three Opperman brothers, Charles, August and Ernest bought the store in 1897. In 1907 they traded the store for some land in Mississippi. From that time until 1915 when Charles Opperman returned, the store was operated by Perry Brothers, the Walrich Brothers and others.

David or "Jerry" Opperman came into the business as a young man and operated it until he sold out to Mr. and Mrs. James Shaughnessy in 1956. Mrs. Shaughnessy is a granddaughter of Charles Opperman, one of the original owners, which makes the Opperman family in ownership of the store for 64 years of its long and interesting history.

#### **COOK'S IGA**

The Cook family is another family that has been in the merchandising business in Piper City for many, many years. Ronald Cook owns and operates the modern supermarket of Cook's IGA on the corner of Peoria and Pine Streets.

His father, George D. Cook, worked in the grocery department of a hardware and grocery store

operated by Henry and Ed Strasma in a building which was located where the Piper Hardware and Variety is now. In 1920, Mr. Cook bought the grocery stock and Joe Lundy bought the hardware stock. Dudley Moore worked for Mr. Lundy and Jack Rice worked for Mr. Cook.

After a short time Mr. Cook moved the grocery store into a separate building where the Legion Hall now is located, and later moved to about the middle of the block where Soran's Restaurant stands today.

Some who worked in the store over the years are: Fred Kemnetz, Ira Still, Frank Bouhl, Glen Christian and Claude Hogan. Mrs. Cook, the former Helen Bishop, also assisted her husband. The store gave credit and also delivered groceries in the early days before the streamlined cash and carry of today.

In 1947 the Central Hotel was sold to the Cooks and the building razed to make room for the new IGA Foodliner. Ronald had come home from service in the Navy and went in as a partner with his father. In 1960 he bought out his father and is now the owner and operator.

#### **PIPER HARDWARE AND VARIETY**

Piper Hardware and Variety now operated by Mr. and Mrs. Duane White is from the business begun in 1927 by W. L. (Bill) Quick. After the disastrous fire in 1926 that destroyed the Tayar Dry Goods Store, the Overacker Restaurant and the Berghouse Meat Market, Mr. Quick built the modern brick building that is there today, and opened an outstanding store in this area.

One of the innovations that Mr. Quick adopted was to display all merchandise on open waist-high counters. There were no high shelves and everything was in easy reach of customer and clerk. This was an entirely new departure in stores of that day and there was no similar store anywhere in this section of Illinois, none even in Kankakee or Danville.

Mr. Quick was a life-long resident of Piper City and had engaged in farming up until he went in the store. Besides the thousand-and-one articles of cutlery, gifts, housewares, electrical appliances, crockery, toys, hosiery and notions, he also stocked bigger items of hardware, farm implements and stoves.

The business was later sold to Bernard Hitchens and Frank White. Hitchens sold out to White and now it is operated by Frank's son, Duane and his wife, Betty.

#### **MANY BUSINESSES IMPORTANT**

Each business in Piper City is important to it

and none should be slighted, but space does not permit a long history of each one.

The Corner Cafe on the north side of Piper City's square is operated by Mrs. Marion Butler, who serves fine food and is well patronized.

Allen Day writes insurance and his company is called familiarly Daisy's Insurance.

Robert Zorn is the local barber and is also the town clerk.

Mr. and Mrs. Donald Dornfield operate the Western Auto Associate Store and keep a nice modern line of goods on hand.

Sauerbier Drug Store has been operated by Mrs. Helen Sauerbier since the death of her husband, John, in 1967. The Drug Store was run for many years by F. A. Thomas and Mr. Sauerbier was the druggist.

L. A. (Jack) Reynolds operates a Standard Oil gas truck and also a farm store on the north side where he sells tires, batteries and other farm needs.

There are several beauty parlors in operation. Mrs. G. L. Switzer operates one in her home, as does Mrs. Donald Jackson, Mrs. Ellis Martin, Mrs. Charles Shoemaker and Mrs. Andie Evans. Mrs. Ogreda Tammam and her daughter, Mrs. Bea LaVoie, operate Bea's Beauty Shoppe on the north side.

Duane Cloos came here shortly after World War II and established Cloos Body Shop where the bodies of cars and trucks are straightened and painted.

The Pirate's Den, an antique and used furniture shop, is owned and operated by Mr. and Mrs. A. W. Opperman. They also own Montelius Manor, the home built in 1871 by John A. Montelius, Sr., which is filled with many of the ancestral possessions of the Montelius family and of that era. The Oppermans open the Manor each Sunday afternoon through the summer for touring.

Eugene E. Doran runs a general insurance agency and is an auctioneer and realtor. At one time he worked for D. A. Klothe in his grocery store.

George Kemnetz owns and operates the Standard Service Station which has been mentioned elsewhere in this history.

Marvin Hitchens operates the Sinclair Station and also drives a Sinclair gas truck hauling gas to the area farmers and also supplies them with various other agricultural needs.

Dan Rogers is owner of the Phillips Service Center. This is on the corner of Main Street and Ill. 115, where the old theater used to be in the days of the silent movies.

C. E. (Patsy) Rice has long been associated with

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*Page Seventy-eight*

movies both inside and outside a theater. He and his brother, John (Jack) Rice, operated the Ace Theater in the 1930's where Pat's Tap is now located.

They also went from town to town showing "free movies" in the railroad park or some other central location. These movies were free to the viewers as they were paid for by the merchants, who contributed as a token of good will to their customers, or in the hope that those who came in to see the movies would also "trade" in their stores.

Jack has not been affiliated with the movies for many years, but Patsy is still showing free movies on Saturday nights in the summer time in Piper City, following a custom that must have been started over 40 years ago. Each one brings a folding chair or a blanket on which to sit and the park is soon converted into an outdoor theater.

Mr. and Mrs. Robert Delap are agents for the Lyons Insurance Agency.

Floyd Donley is a dealer in scrap metal and also is bus driver for the school.

W. D. Miller and Son are sanitary engineers and clean septic tanks and drains. W. D., or Durell as he is called, was injured in a truck accident in 1966 and his son Allen carries on the business. They are descended from William Miller, one of the earliest settlers.

B. N. Stephens and Sons are painters and have been in business for many years.

McKee Home Service is headed by Forrest McKee and they sell and service gas furnaces.

John R. Keefe has a welding shop a mile west of town.

McMillan Fertilizer has offices in the home of Howard McMillan, Jr.

Ron Weibers is the agent for F/S Petroleum.

Robert Van Antwerp is a contractor and carpenter.

Robert Mogged and Thees Sterrenberg are cement contractors.

Walt Miller is chief of Miller Electric and they wire homes and businesses and do other electrical work.

Floyd Stumph has an apiary.

Ivan Weber and Robert Hewardine operate a car wash.

Raymond Mylcraine is postmaster.

#### PROFESSIONAL MEN

Piper City, from the early days, has been blessed with a high caliber of professional men. Dr. R. J. Piper was one of the earliest physicians. Dr. S. D. Culbertson was another early doctor and druggist and was active in civic affairs. He was

reportedly the first doctor at the scene of the tragic train wreck west of Piper City in 1887.

In later years Dr. Tieken was a faithful caretaker of the health of the citizenry. He called on the sick, driving a horse and buggy that became familiar, and sometimes, a most welcome sight.

Dr. L. C. Diddy was another physician who served the community in the early part of the 20th century.

Piper City has also had some fine dentists, including Dr. Frederick Erhardt shortly after 1900 and Dr. R. E. Squires until his retirement in the 1950's. Dr. W. P. Mabry is the present fine dentist, having come here 15 years ago.

Many present day "old timers" can recall the colorful and highly respected veterinarian, Dr. P. C. Ballou, who always seemed to be in a hurry, hustling about with a big chew of tobacco in his mouth.

He was one of the first men in town to own an automobile, and if you saw a cloud of dust on a country road you might guess that it was "Doc" hastening to the stable-side of one of his patients.

He was a connoisseur of fine horseflesh and kept a stable of spirited and gaited thoroughbreds. He also had a Negro trainer, Leslie Carpenter, who came from Kentucky. In accord with the custom of the day, Les ate and slept in the fine stable, and was cordially accepted by Piper City town folks because of his dignified and courteous manners.

Sometimes Doc and his step daughter, Effie Miller, would go out riding in the evening and Les would usually ride with them, keeping a discreet distance behind and people would murmur how well he knew his place.

Piper City is now served by a veterinary clinic with Dr. W. G. Raudabaugh, Dr. W. L. Hay and Dr. James Finnell caring for the animal population. Because of the changes in agriculture and the sparsity of farm animals their practice is now much concerned with pets and small animals.

Dr. Raudabaugh came here in 1938 and Dr. W. L. Hay in 1950. Dr. Finnell, who resides in Gilman, was the last to join the clinic staff.

Dr. Raudabaugh has been a Ford County Supervisor for many years and it is interesting to note that all have served on a school board, Dr. Raudabaugh and Dr. Hay in Piper City and Dr. Finnell in Gilman.

Dr. C. E. Branch came in 1934, buying the practice from Dr. H. C. Sauer. Dr. H. A. McIntosh joined him in 1947 and their practice includes many people from the outlying towns, as many small towns do not have a doctor in 1969. Piper City is unusually fortunate in having two fine doctors.

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Craftsmen were proud of their work in the "good old days" and harness makers were no exception. A. A. Long worked in the Cooke Harness Shop for several years. He left Piper City shortly after 1900.



Duffy Fortier used to drive a huckster wagon through the countryside. He is shown in the yard of the Joseph Mitchinson farm. The Mitchinsons were grandparents of Mrs. George Vaughn.

# HEREFORD



**FICKLIN FARMS**

**PIPER CITY, ILLINOIS**

**George**

**Florence**

**Skip**

**EAT HEREFORD MEAT, CAN'T BE BEAT**



Peter Jensen, like other men of his day, was proud of his matched team and rig.



Some farmers liked mules better than horses for farming. H. W. Bargmann got a lot of work done with this team of mules.

FOR A GOOD TIME

COME TO



Known as PAT'S TAP

SINCE 1947

Until the death of John Sauerbier in 1967, Piper City also had a druggist, which made a full complement of professional men.

Marmion Scott was a native son who returned to his home town as a lawyer and was acclaimed one of the finest lawyers in the area. He was well known for his accuracy and precision. He served this community's legal needs for many years. His death occurred August 13, 1959, at the age of 88. He was the son of pioneer John A. Scott.

After his death Piper City was served by another native son, Durwood Hummel, who made his home in Paxton but had office hours in Piper City once a week. He was the son of Mr. and Mrs. Earl Hummel.

For several years Faraday Strock has been coming to Piper City from Pontiac one day a week, with his office in the State Bank.

#### THREE SERVE IN STATE LEGISLATURE

Three men have gone from here to represent their district in the state legislature. John A. Montelius, Sr., served in three General Assemblies, being elected first in 1900.

A. C. (Abe) Thompson was another Piper Cityan who had enough of the confidence and support of his fellow citizens to send him to the Illinois House of Representatives.

More recently Joseph W. Russell served several terms as a state representative, retiring in 1968.

#### PERSONAL GLIMPSES

There have been many people living in Piper City during the last 100 years who were outstanding or interesting for one reason or another. We cannot mention them all, but here are a few personal glimpses.

#### JOHN CULVER

One of the earliest druggists was John C. Culver, who was here in the 1870's after he had ridden the pony express from Fort Wallis to Denver, served as an Indian Scout and had been chief scout for William F. Cody, or "Buffalo Bill", as he was called. In 1880 John went into the grain business for a time and was also an early Ford County coroner.

#### FRANK WALRICH

Captain Frank O. Walrich was a general merchant in Piper City, after having served in the Civil War. He was in charge of the prisoners at Fort Donelson and also took part in Sherman's campaign. Captain Walrich was drill sergeant for Company C, a section of the militia that met regularly

for drill in Piper City from after the Civil War until after 1900. Mr. Walrich replaced William C. Baughman, who moved from Piper City to Kansas.

#### 1880 MILLER

One Piper Cityan was written up in "Ripley's Believe It or Not" because of her unusual name. 1880 Miller was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. R. B. Miller. The family lived in the north part of town and Mr. Miller operated a corn sheller and other machinery. 1880 attended the local grade school until the family moved away. She was called "Eighty."

#### BOB WOLSEY

Bob Wolsey was a musician of some note; a harmonica player and clog dancer. His greatest accomplishment was playing the "bones" and in the 1920's no public gathering was complete without a few numbers by Mr. Wolsey.

#### JOHN THOMISON

John Thomison grew up on a farm just north of town, but he could hardly wait to become a balloonist. He was a great admirer of Ben Anderson of Ashkum and when he was only 10 or 12 he rode his bicycle all the way to Watseka to begin his career as a balloonist. He came back to his old home town many times, later on, to appear as the featured attraction in the regular balloon ascensions that highlighted almost every fair or celebration.

About 10 years ago he made his final ascension to mark the 50th anniversary of his start in the business. Unfortunately he did not get off to a good start and drifted into some wires and the ride was soon over. He was one of Piper City's sons who had a long and successful career in a job that he loved.

#### AL KOESTNER — BIG TIME BALL PLAYER

Piper City has had several athletes who have stood out as "memorable", the most noteworthy of whom is Al Koestner. He was the small town boy who made good playing in the big leagues. He was the idol of every small boy and even many of the big boys.

He pitched for teams around Piper City where he was undisputed champion on the pitcher's mound. No one in these parts could match him or even come close. This was in a day when young men loved to play ball for recreation, and one team that had uniforms and played a regular schedule with neighboring towns, was the Hills Indians. Sand Ridge also had a team, the Swamp Angels, managed for years by Frank (Spec) Lyons. Whoever had Al for their pitcher was usually the winner.

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The Mogul basketball team had quite a reputation and was active before and after World War I. Shown are seated, John Kelly, Fred Koestner, Al Koestner and Joe Burger. Standing: Jerry Opperman, Walter Gibb, Pete Kelly, Elmer Chafey, Jim O'Mara, and Joe Kelly.

Al kept going up higher in the leagues until he was earning as much as \$400 a month and expenses. For his day and age (about 1910-11-12) this was a huge sum considering that farm hands were paid 20 a month plus board and room.

Al first pitched successfully for Los Angeles. Then he was brought up to the Cub's organization in Chicago. He pitched several games for the Cubs and was later traded to Cincinnati.

After he retired from baseball he came back to Piper City, where in the 1930's he ran a pool hall and sometimes on Sunday he earned some extra money pitching for a team that needed the services of an ex-professional.

More recently Doug Harford gained considerable recognition for playing varsity football at the University of Illinois. Harvard (Bud) Johnson played football at Bradley University at Peoria and David Keefe was starred as a pitcher at Illinois Wesleyan at Bloomington.

Don, Ted and Dave Read all pitched for college teams.

#### NELS PLANK, AUCTIONEER

Not everyone has the gift of gab necessary to be an auctioneer, but G. P. (Nels) Plank was one of those rare souls. He was a distinguished looking

man with shaggy hair, heavy eyebrows and a flowing mustache. Erect of bearing, he carried with him an air of authority.

There was no one better with words when it came to a farm sale or auctioneering off a yard filled with household items. His words ran together in a singing chant that fascinated all listeners and brought quick results. He was called "Colonel" after the custom of the day.

He was also a justice of the peace, performing marriages and hearing trials of a small nature that would come up in a small town.

#### D. A. KLOETHE, MERCHANT

D. A. Kloethe was a Piper City merchant in the early 1900's who is best remembered for his "fire sales" and "line rings."

He himself had several fires and whenever there was a fire in a nearby town, or even at quite a distance, Mr. Kloethe would often buy out the stock and have a fire sale where people drove for miles to get the bargains.

The line ring was given whenever fresh raspberries arrived for canning or if something came in that he wanted all farm ladies to know about.

The operator, who was called "central" in those days, rang a series of long and short rings so that everyone knew that they were to listen in on the

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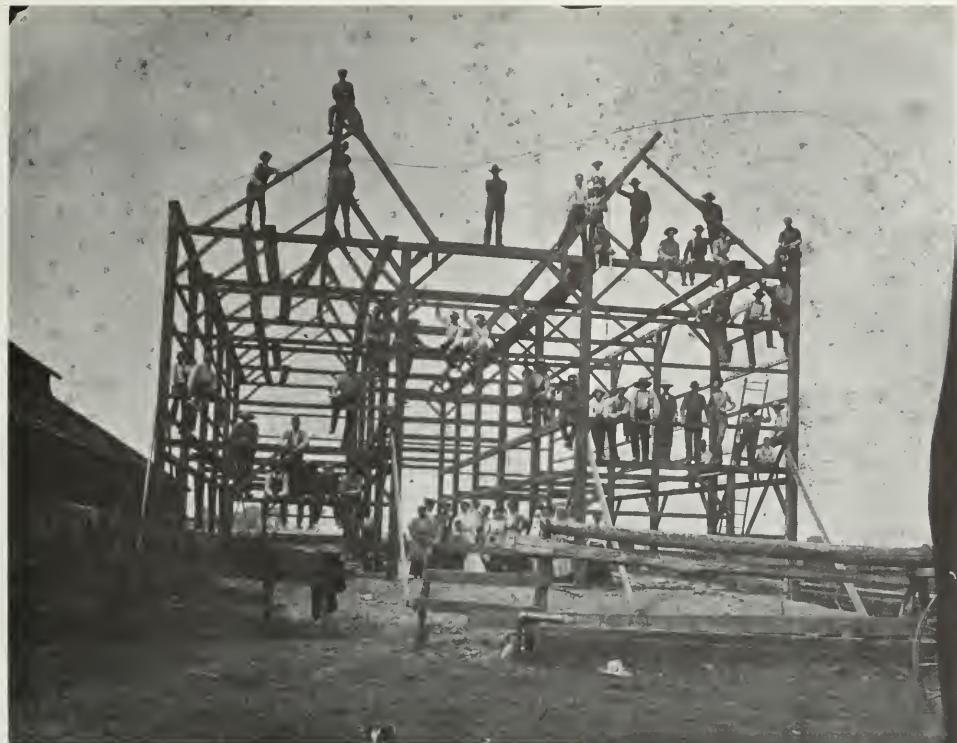
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Neighbors enjoyed getting together for work or for fun. Sometimes they combined a little of both. Pictured is a barn raising at the Abe Thompson farm.



Women sometimes got together for an afternoon of visiting as in this picture.

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Fred (Mickey) Kemnetz retired in June 1969 after over 30 years in law enforcement in Piper City. He and Mayor Merle Harford are shown with new police car in 1968.



Cook's IGA Foodliner was built on the corner where the Central Hotel had stood. Eugene E. Doran built an office building next to it. Both were built in 1947.

Lloyd B. Gillittle  
Lee Maplethorpe  
Myra Maplethorpe  
Ruth Movern  
Veda Alberts  
Allen Berry  
Francis Bergmann  
William Pericook  
Andrew L. Frellich  
John T. Lyons  
Alfred F. Montefusco  
Janet Ward  
Barney J. Cassidy  
Donald Harford  
W. R. Crandall  
Daniel F. Rogers  
John D. Somer  
Merle Harford  
Joe Van Horn  
Dane Kulawski  
Ray Keele  
Ruth Hanna  
Charles Rodgers  
Edith Frellich  
Laurie Haase  
Aileen Link  
Marjorie Bergmann  
Dell Stucky  
Duffy J. Berry  
Ronald E. Wibers  
James Shaughnessy  
James E. Shaughnessy  
Robert W. Zorn  
Allen F. Day  
Rosemary Dampfle  
Michael B. Hayes  
Elmer Lamb  
Ralph Bradbury  
Howard Wilson  
Edith Thelte  
Ruth French  
Wallace Essington

message. When the operator had heard several ticks signifying that several receivers had been lifted off the hooks and that everyone on the line as listening she would deliver a message somewhat like this:

"A shipment of Michigan raspberries has just arrived at D. A. Kloethe's. Red raspberries \$2.75 a case, and black raspberries for \$1.75. There will be no more until next Friday."

For this service Mr. Kloethe paid the operator a small sum and it was a cheap and effective way of advertising.

#### LAW ENFORCEMENT

Many have been called upon to enforce the law in Piper City. Sometimes the high spirited farm hands got a hold of some bottled spirits and would have to be locked up over night and fined.

There was a small "calaboose" down about where the entrance to the junk yard is today and was not unlikely for it to have one or more occupants almost every weekend.

Jess Barnstable was the village magistrate or constable about 1910-11 and 12. He was a tall, lean man with a friendly smile that didn't always seem to go with his job.

He was the first police officer in Piper City to order a uniform from Sears, Roebuck & Co. Others had worn everyday work clothes and there was nothing to distinguish them from any other citizen except the star they pinned to their vest.

Not so with Jess. He dressed up in his uniform, all spick and span, and wore it proudly and well, especially Saturday nights when Main Street was crowded. He would stroll quietly around the square, quieting down rowdy young fellows, settling disputes, and always took time to visit with friends. He was always friendly, but strict, and was treated with respect.

Once he gave a leading citizen a summons for driving his car up town without lights after the sun had gone down, which was forbidden by a city ordinance. Jess enforced the ordinance even though the leading citizen was furious. A small fine was paid.

Fred (Mickey) Kemnetz, who retired July 1, 1969, has been the village constable off and on for over 30 years. Weighing over 200 pounds, his size and strength have helped him "speak with authority."

One of the most exciting happenings during his career was the time the escaped robbers of the Buckley Bank stalled their car four miles south and east of town and fled into a corn field. One of the robbers had been injured in a gun battle at Buckley. This happened in July of 1931.

It was not long until all the law enforcement agencies of the area were represented here, but since Mick was on the spot he organized the local men and they armed themselves with whatever weapons they had and proceeded to the abandoned car and branched out from there.

Someone circled the field in an airplane in hopes of sighting the fugitives.

They finally felt reasonably sure that the bandits were in a small crib a half mile south of Alva Mylcraine's and taking cover as best they could the men pretty well surrounded the crib and ordered the robbers out.

The story is told that after the desperadoes were ordered out that Mick called to a companion to "turn that machine gun on 'em." The companion, not used to playing cops and robbers asked, "What machine gun?"

Perhaps it was fortunate that the wounded man was needing the attention of a doctor and the men soon gave themselves up and were taken into Piper City where the wounded man was treated and both were placed in the village jail, one of the last, if not the last time it has ever been used.

People simply poured into Piper City to get a look at these men and women and children filed by the jail and peered in through the bars to see what manner of men these were, anyway.

#### THE GENERAL STORE

There have been several outstanding "merchandisers" in the history of our town. One of the most interesting merchants around 1910 was W. H. (Bill) Roberts, who operated one of the finest and largest department stores in Central Illinois. He had clothing, shoes, drygoods and groceries all under one roof — everything the family needed to feed and clothe them. This was in the days before the family had been "let out by the auto and the world let in by radio." Shopping was all done at home in local stores.

Roberts' store was the first in a small town to install a system of overhead trolleys to carry baskets filled with the items purchased to a balcony where it was checked and wrapped. This was quite a spectacle and no doubt many items were purchased just to see the conveyor work.

Bill was a bachelor and lived in the hotel at the west end of Peoria Ave. which was run by the Schuylers at that time.

Bill cut a fancy figure riding around the country in his red Rambler and made many hearts flutter, but he remained single and after he sold his store he worked by the hour as a carpenter.

#### MANY VETERANS HAVE LIVED HERE

Many have served their country from this com-

munity in the little over a century since the first settlers came. There is no evidence that any went directly from here to the Civil War, but many veterans settled here afterwards and for many years there was an active unit of the Grand Army of the Republic.

James McBride, who was active in civic affairs and president of the fair board, was a Civil War veteran who marched in Grand Review before President Abraham Lincoln in Washington, D. C., before being mustered out of the Union Army. He was a large landowner and a director of the First National Bank.

Another young man who passed in review before President Lincoln, and later settled here, was William M. Dick, grandfather of Mrs. John Ark. A colorful figure, he ran away from home in Niles, Mich. when he was 16 and joined the Union Army.

He served under McClellan, Burnside, Grant and Sherman. He fought in the battles of South Mountain, Antietam, Fredericksburg, and took part in the siege of Vicksburg and of Knoxville.

At the close of the war, he returned to Niles and shortly thereafter came to Ford County. He had read in the Chicago Tribune that land was for sale in this area very cheap. He bought land northeast of Piper City, and he and his wife, the former Sophronia McLain, lived on the farm several years before moving to Piper City. He sold the farm to the Anderson family, who still own it.

In 1930 the American Legion Gibb Post No. 588 honored him with a banquet, he being the only remaining Civil War veteran in Piper City. He died Nov. 21, 1933.

John C. Wilson, who has many descendants in Piper City, but few by the name of Wilson, died in 1922 and was one of the last of the "old soldiers." There were many others.

#### **WORLD WAR I**

Many of Piper City's sons went off to war in 1916 when the United States joined the Allies in fighting Germany to "Make the World Safe for Democracy." One of the first to go and also one of the first to get back was T. E. Jeffries, and there were many who followed him. The only one who didn't return was Walter Gibb, who used to play basketball on the Mogul team and was well known throughout the area. Gibb Post of the American Legion was named for him.

#### **MISS ANDREWS GOES TO ENGLAND**

Miss Agnes Andrews caught the imagination of the townspeople when she went into full time overseas work for the Young Men's Christian As-

sociation. Her jobs were varied and one of them was to sell cocoa, tea and cakes to the servicemen. She traveled in England and on the Continent. The Piper City Journal carried long letters she wrote back to the townspeople telling of her adventures in a strange land.

She was overseas after the signing of the Armistice and as the American boys were being mustered back to the United States. In England she attended the first Grand National held after the war and it no doubt was impressive to a Midwesterner to see the horses jump the hurdles and hedges in the big race.

She also attended the big Peace Parade in London with General Pershing leading the parade, followed by a large band and troops of hand picked soldiers in full dress uniforms from all the allied countries. There were caterpillar tanks and guns and, all in all, it was very impressive. Miss Agnes wrote back to Piper City friends, "The U. S. men were the best looking in the whole parade."

#### **ARMISTICE SIGNED**

The end of World War I came with the signing of the Armistice on November 11, 1918. This news had been looked for for several days and even weeks, and when it came everyone everywhere celebrated wildly.

In Piper City, Mayor Sowers announced early in the day the expected signing of the armistice terms by the German envoys, and said the celebration proper would begin at four o'clock in Piper City, giving the school children and the country people a chance to get in and join.

At four o'clock everyone had turned out and was armed with whistles, bells, pans and "clackers." Automobile horns were kept going, whistles were blown, bells rung, guns fired and anvils struck — in fact about anything that would make a noise was brought into use.

A parade was formed, headed by the Piper City Cornet Band and marched through the streets and many times around the "square." A feature of the parade was a casket for the Kaiser hauled on Bob Melvin's big truck and upon which were seated a number of young ladies representing their friends or sweethearts "Over There." After the parade an effigy of the Kaiser was dragged through the streets trailing an automobile.

With a short intermission for supper the celebration continued. The band played several numbers, the Kaiser was burned in effigy in the Railroad Park, after which a huge bonfire was built and the band, followed by hundreds of men, women and children, circled around it while hundreds of others kept up an incessant noise, blowing horns



MEMORIAL DAY 1969

r whistles. About nine o'clock the festivities began to subside and people started to leave for their homes, but still jubilantly happy over the termination of the great struggle which had caused so much bloodshed and anguish in the world.

Alfred Montelius, who was a small boy at the time, got a bullet in his shoulder from the gun of a happy celebrant, so the day, though a joyous one, was not without its mishap. Fortunately Alfred was not seriously hurt.

Again when World War II broke out, there was hardly a young man left to carry on the work of the farms and businesses and many went overseas to serve in the long hard struggle that ended in 1945. This time Piper City was not so lucky. James Boma, William Williams, and James Delap never returned. There were others who were close to Piper Cityans who died in service. It was a time of great strain and sadness and when peace finally came the victory celebrations were mild in comparison to the frenzied reaction at the end of World War I.

#### TELEPHONE COMPANY

In the early 1900's, Piper City, like many other towns and villages, began to get organized for telephone service and through the efforts of John

A. Montelius, Jr., Page Glass, J. A. Cooke and others the Piper City Telephone Company was formed.

The first operator worked night and day and although she may not have handled many calls, the pay was small and the work confining.

For many years Miss Anna Hancock was the night operator. About that time the operators received just 10c an hour.

The office was in the corner of what was then the First National Bank building or where the State Bank is now located.

Early linemen and trouble shooters for the company were J. C. Lampkin, James Steadman, John Drilling and John (Pinky) Boyle. Mrs. Boyle was also an operator and secretary of the company for many years.

Laura Moore Wilson was another early operator. Miss Esther Moore was a chief operator for many years, following Miss Inez McClain. At the time, in 1963, that the telephone company went to dial service, Mrs. L. A. Reynolds was the chief operator.

The telephone service has been under three companies. The Illinois Commercial Telephone Company bought out the privately owned original company and later the General Telephone Company bought them out.

Rosamond S. Stephens  
wayne Harold  
John Baechler Jr.  
John Baechler Jr.  
Alex Aweofman  
Roy Ackerman Sr.  
Virgil Wilkey  
R.C. O'Hanagan  
Adam Weber  
Marie Haase  
William P. Mabry DDS  
Rosemary Jackson  
Don Jackson  
Dave Frye  
Don Kennedy  
Rev. Jack M. Thompson  
Mrs. Vera Thompson  
Jerry Rebholz  
Dorothy Walle  
Dick Kennedy  
Betty Lou Kennedy

Frank Shute  
Mary Ellen Crandall  
George Wilkey  
Evelyn Rebholz  
Mike Johnson  
Dennis Boma  
C E Reiss  
Gary Hurt  
Ray McElrath  
Fred W Rosendall  
Albert Groelich  
Harold Rhode  
Janet A. Cubitt  
Arnold A. Lambert  
Myrion F. Walle  
Glen A. Church  
Clarence D. Kincaide  
Russell Sieba  
Tex Hirschman  
Russell S. Peery  
Raymond J. Martin



Harry Hill operated several threshing machines and shellers. This is one of his threshing machine rigs.

There is hardly a home in Piper City without a telephone and every business probably makes several long distance calls every week. Several have talked to loved ones in service half way around the world and have been able to hear and to be heard very well.

A far cry from the contrary instrument of the early days that tried men's patience and cowed many a man into asking his wife to talk over the "thing" when an important matter came up. His wife would fearlessly (almost) engage the monster while he stood beside her and told her what to say.

Women took to the telephone with more enthusiasm than did the men. They soon learned that here was an excellent way to break the monotony of the long days and also to organize club meetings and to do all kinds of planning and promoting.

#### EARLY FARM STYLE

One of the big delights for country kids was the day when the threshing machine moved into the yard for a few days of threshing.

The big steam engines belched black smoke from the smoke stack and as it came slowly up

the road pulling its separator and water tank, it was a sight to thrill young and old.

Threshing was not only a time of harvest, it was also a time of feasting. All farmers had their threshing ring. This meant that each man in the ring helped every other man and if he had more oats than the others, he furnished an extra hired hand.

The men all ate at the place where they were working that day and every meal was a banquet. Farm wives "laid themselves out" to set a good table. There was usually two kinds of meat, mashed potatoes and gravy, corn on the cob, sliced tomatoes, salads of all kinds and a choice of pie and cake.

The combines that began to automate the harvests in the 1930's brought an end to the era of the threshing ring where neighbor helped neighbor and women helped each other in minding the children and doing the cooking.

#### GRAIN AND CHAFF

A barn raising was another community effort that was once common and is gone today. When a man got ready to build a barn and many of the farmers built them big in order to hold lots of

Serry Wilson  
Avetus money  
R. J. Foley, Haydette  
Faraday Stock  
Linda Rogers  
John Kuntzback  
Larry S. Pearson  
Ronald R. Downs  
Helen Jackson  
Betty White  
Thomas Walters  
Howard M. Miller  
Raymond A. Lane  
Stanley Wilson  
Mannin Kitchens  
John C. Penicook  
W. J. Baudabeug  
Paul E. Parkinson

Marie Call  
Geo. Sternberg  
H. W. Baumonne  
Mr. Wm L. Fay  
Harold A. Warner  
Marilyn Alexander  
Zlatie Zorn  
Robert Sternberg  
Wayne E. Bona  
Marilyn R. Bona  
James D. Stuckey  
Esther M. Day  
Bernice Wilson  
Richard Boma  
Tony Boma  
Camilla Farn  
Mildred Rosendahl  
John De Long  
Rex Reinagle  
Irene K. Johnson  
Max Boma

livestock, they got the lumber on hand, then sent for all the farmers in the area to come with their hammers and help build it. Huge barns were built in almost no time as many hands made a quick job of it.

When the barn was built and before the livestock was put in, they would have a barn dance and everybody that helped would come back for an evening of dancing and gaiety. The music was furnished by several fiddlers and someone who could chord on an organ or piano. Wilbur Gourley was one of the most popular callers for square dancing and many are the "do sa dos" and "allemande lefts" he has called in his time.

Another harvest custom was that you should have oyster stew for supper on the night you finished shucking corn. It was a treat that was looked forward to and no one ever weakened and had it before the harvest was finished, either.

#### OUR FOUNDERS

A book in itself could be written about the founders of our town and their descendants, some of whom still live here, but we will have to satisfy ourselves with a brief review.

Dr. William A. Piper, for whom Piper City was named, has been somewhat a figure of mystery, without very much known about him. I am indebted to Mrs. Robert Chambers, Sr., who through family research has supplied us with a short biography. She is the granddaughter of John A. Montelius, Sr., nephew and close associate in the early days of Dr. Piper.

Dr. Piper was born March 5, 1820, in Milton, Pennsylvania, the son of Frederick A. and Mary Cubberly Piper. He died July 6, 1896 in Philadelphia. He is buried in Laurel Cemetery nearby.

He married Mary Bibighaus, a daughter of Rev. and Mrs. Henry Bibighaus, December 21, 1844. They had two daughters and a son: Elizabeth, 1845-1876; Milton A., born 1847, and Emma Louise, born 1847.

Elizabeth married J. D. S. Gast, a brother of Mrs. John Montelius, Sr.

Two sisters of Dr. Piper married Piper City men and figured in Piper City history. Rebecca, born August 14, 1816, married Charles Montelius, February 16, 1841. Their children were William Piper Montelius, 1841-1865; John Augustus Montelius, 1844-1920, and Harry Gast Montelius, 1858-1900. Rebecca died May 1, 1866.

Another sister, Maria Louise, married James Madden. Their daughter, Rebecca married Nels Plank. Their children were Laura, who married Elmer Lansdale (daughter, Mildred); Rebecca

(Reba) married Lester Sowers (daughter Margaret); Esther married Phil Scott (son John and daughter Edna).

It seems clear that although the town was named for Dr. Piper, he never lived here. He did have large land holdings and he made large investments of capital in the early businesses with his nephew, John A. Montelius, Sr.

There was a Dr. Richard J. Piper, who practiced medicine here for several years. He left in the 1880's and some who have heard about him believed him to be the Dr. Piper for whom the town was named.

#### JOHN A. MONTELIOUS, SR.

The town owes much to John A. Montelius, Sr., whose business acumen and ability made him one of the founding fathers to be highly respected and remembered.

He came to Piper City after the Civil War in which he served, even though at first rejected because of his small stature. He came with only \$1200, but built a large fortune in land and other assets.

He was engaged in the grain business, in banking, in the general store, in lumber and many other businesses and made a success of every venture. He and Dr. Piper were often partners and it is supposed that Dr. Piper put up much of the money in the early days and Mr. Montelius supplied the management skill. He came to Illinois originally to look after the large land interests of his uncle.

He went back to his home in Mifflinburg, Pennsylvania, to marry his childhood sweetheart, Katherine Gast. When they arrived in Piper City in 1867 there were just five houses. They at first lived in a house owned by Dr. Piper that later was known as the Culbertson house. They built their fine home in 1871 which is known today as Montelius Manor.

Descendents of Mr. Montelius living here are Alfred and Miss Ruth Montelius, Mrs. Robert Chambers, Sr., Mrs. Edwin Read and her children.

#### HIAWATHA DAVIS

Mrs. J. J. Lyons' grandfather, Hiawatha Davis, was brought here at the age of nine months by his parents, Joseph and Rebecca Davis. They came from Ohio in a covered wagon in 1858. Settling between what is now Piper City and Chatsworth, their nearest neighbors were the L. T. Bishops and Franklin Oliver.

On the night of the terrible train wreck in 1887 survivors made their way to the Davis home where many lanterns lighted up the yard for a

Vera Bishop Soren  
Matthew James Soren  
Isabella M. Perkinson  
George Danielle ~~Kennedy~~  
Gary M. Reed

Douglas A. Berry  
Imogene Rice

Hilda Miller  
Dorothy Jelle

Walt Essington  
Nancy Griggs

David Essington  
Irvin L. Ellman Jr.  
Robert Ray Reed  
Miriam Jackson

Erma A. Stuckey  
Bill Berry  
Susan L. Berry

Doris Anne Klehm  
Caroline Marie Thorndike  
Mary Louise "Nikki" Dorley  
Lilla Smedaker Wilson  
Sylvia Smedaker  
Leigh Ann Sterrenberg  
D.K. Walrich  
Mabel E. Walrich  
Norella E. White  
Lorraine White  
Susan Clark  
Linda Nattie Keeler  
Anna Haysett  
Arlon J. McGuire  
Mayanna C. French  
Ronald Bishop Cook  
Della Mae Bork  
Joan Keever  
Raybie Essington  
Horace Geisler  
Marie Geisler

summer party. The wounded were cared for in the home and a baby was left there for some time after the wreck.

#### DANIEL MARBLE

Daniel Marble met an untimely and tragic death in 1869, when he drowned while trying to ford the Vermilion River. He was just 36 and left three daughters. Mr. Marble probably has more descendants in this area than any other early settler. His daughters were Malvina Read (Aunt Viney), Grace Perkins and Nettie Serene.

George Perry and Mrs. Margaret Brown are descended from two pioneers, Archibald McKinney and William Corey.

Robert Wells, great grandfather of Duane White, settled north of Piper City.

Rebecca and Robert Chayer are living on the same farm settled by their great, great grandfather, Robert Hevener.

Notice should be taken of the Read boys who moved onto land north and east of town. The 1884 atlas names five — Charles, Arby, Thomas, Butler and Ed. There are still Reads farming land originally farmed by these so-called boys.

Thomas Cue, a native of England, came to America in 1853, settling in Woodford County. He moved to Brenton Township in 1870. His descendants include the Wayne and Dean Jensen families.

Debbie Kane, 12 year old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. William Kane, is the fifth generation of her family to live on the same farm. Some of the original house from her ancestor, W. Gardner, is still in the present home.

Leslie and Greg Herriott are the fifth generation from Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Clark, who moved here in 1890. At one time Mr. and Mrs. Herriott, Greg and Leslie, lived on the family homestead, which is now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Gene Froelich and family, in Section 22 in Brenton Township. This is especially interesting because this is the section to which John R. Lewis first came.

The Ronald Cook family is descended from at least two early pioneers. Ronald's great grandfather on his mother's side was L. T. Bishop, who came here in 1857. E. E. Bishop, son of L. T., married Dora Carpenter, who was the daughter of H. S. Carpenter, who came here in 1867.

#### J. A. COOKE, HARNESS MAKER

J. A. Cooke, who came here from Pennsylvania, was one of the leading pioneers. He was a skilled craftsman in harness making and his business was as important to the early settlers as the implement shop is to modern farmers.

A fine team of horses was no stronger than its harness and the farmers had confidence in Mr. Cooke's work. A few families still treasure a bit of harness that Mr. Cooke made in his shop for their forebears so long ago.

Mr. and Mrs. Cooke were both prominent in civic and church affairs and both served on the school board.

They had two children, Delmar and Geraldine. Dr. Delmar Cooke came back to the Cooke ancestral home in Piper City after his retirement as a professor of English at the University of Texas. Miss Geraldine is an accomplished musician and photographer in New York City and spends quite a little time here with her brother.

Dr. Cooke is Piper City's only author, having written, "William Dean Howells" in 1922. The book is a critical study of the life and works of Mr. Howells.

Joseph Miller worked for Mr. Cooke in the harness shop and later bought him out. As tractors replaced horses the shop was converted into a shoe repair shop in the 1930's and now stands empty on Main Street.

#### JUDGE H. P. BEACH

Judge H. P. Beach has no descendants living here, and perhaps none at all, but he was one of the most interesting and influential of the pioneers. He served in the Civil War and was a strong opponent to slavery. For more than four and a half years he served continuously, in both the infantry and heavy artillery. He served successively in about all positions from private to commander of his company. He participated in some of the most important military operations of the Mississippi valley, under Grant, Sherman, Sheridan, Banks, McClellan, and others.

While in service he raised \$715.30 for the Lincoln monument at Springfield, and received a personal letter of acknowledgment from Governor Oglesby.

Judge Beach's grandmother was Mary Tomkins, a near relative of Daniel D. Tomkins, who was prominent in the early history of our country, one time governor of New York and vice president for eight years under James Monroe.

Judge Beach and his young southern bride came to Piper City following the Civil War and he resumed the study of law which had been interrupted by his service years. He was admitted to the bar in 1870, and for three years, was engaged in private practice. In 1873 he was elected to the County Board of Supervisors and in later years was elected County Judge for three years.

He was considered one of the best orators in

Willis B. Pearson  
Robert 66

James Edmund Colbray

Mary Hayes

Beth Wilson

Joe Small

Bill McFee

LeRoy D. Cassidy

John R. Essington

Duane G. Clore

Wm Perring

June Wagner.

Marcus N Clark

Ruth Fagan

Amy Eheart

Earl Eheart

Samuel D Martin

Howard B Stuckey



This picture was taken of several ladies from north of town. Shown at right of picture are Mrs. Pat Gallahue (in dark dress with white scarf), just back of her is Mrs. Pat O'Mara and just right of her is Mrs. John Pool, Sr.

Eastern Illinois and did much political speaking and campaigning. He was editor and publisher of the Pan Handle Advocate, a weekly newspaper.

It is a matter of concern to some people that Beach Street, which was named after Judge Beach, has somehow by the year 1969 got changed to Beech Street, as though it were named for the tree. This one mark of respect given the Judge by the early townspeople has almost been erased except for old maps and records. Done, no doubt, through error and without malice.

#### BI-COUNTY

Bi-County was a thriving little community that flourished in pioneer days and then died out more than 50 years ago. It was located in the Sand Ridge area. It was said you could buy anything from pins to a threshing machine at Bi-County.

Everything was hauled in by wagon, even the mail which came from La Hogue. Albert Lamb, father of Elmer Lamb, was the first mail carrier and fixed up a one-horse cart so that he could carry the mail bags.

Joe Bagley and E. E. Plummer drove a huckster wagon around through the country with supplies

from the general store. There was also a blacksmith shop.

There were lots of young hired hands working on the farms in this area and they had a baseball team called the Bi-County Red Sox. Al Koestner used to pitch for them sometimes when he was just starting out.

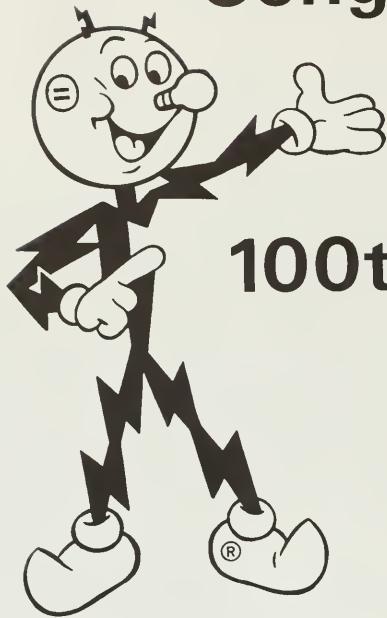
Saturday night in Bi-County was always a big night as many of the men preferred to gather there than in Piper City where it was "dry." These men worked hard and liked to blow off steam on Saturday night.

Will DeMoure, uncle of Ralph DeMoure, ran the general store for many years.

#### PIPER CITY HAS MANY CLUBS

There are many clubs and civic organizations thriving in Piper City, some of which go far back into history. Piper Lodge 608 AF & AM is the oldest organization. It received its charter October 1, 1868. The first master of the lodge was Wilson Ong. There are six living 50-year members. They are Victor Pearson, John Boyle, R. C. DeMoure, J. J. Lyons, George Perry and Otis Kirkham.

Piper Order of Eastern Star Chapter 578 was chartered November 12, 1906 and they have eight



# Congratulations Piper City on your 100th anniversary

The year was 1919. The Treaty of Versailles was signed in Paris, the 18th Amendment became law, such entertainment notables as Liberace, Tennessee Ernie Ford and Nat King

Cole were born, the famous French artist Renoir died and Jack Dempsey KO'ed challenger Carl Morris in the third round.

That was the year CIPS began serving Piper City with electricity.

In 1919, the average use of electric service by a Piper City home was 170 kilowatt hours. Today, the average is almost 33 times as much.

While the use of electricity in Piper City continues to increase year after year, the unit cost has been going down. In fact, the average cost per kilowatt hour of electricity is 24% less than just 10 years ago!

To meet the growing requirement for electric service . . . now and in the future . . . we at CIPS are constantly planning ahead so that ample power will always be available to the homes, businesses and industries in Piper City and other communities we serve.

**CENTRAL ILLINOIS PUBLIC SERVICE COMPANY**

living 50-year members, Mrs. Margaret Brown, Mrs. J. W. Hickerson, Mrs. Mae Rohrbach, Mrs. R. E. Squires, Mrs. Jean Leiser Scott, Mrs. Jean Burger and Mr. and Mrs. Otis Kirkham. The first worthy patron and worthy matron were George Montelius and Mrs. Mae Long.

In 1900 there were the Modern Woodmen of America, Odd Fellows, Forresters, Royal Circle and the Grand Army of the Republic, all of which are gone.

#### MONDAY NIGHT CIRCLE

The first social club was the Monday Night Circle organized October 4, 1899 with ten charter members. Miss Clara Bishop, daughter of E. E. Bishop and granddaughter of L. T. Bishop, was one of the charter members. She was graduated from Normal University, Normal and had come back to teach Algebra, Physiology and Physical Geography, the first that these subjects had been taught here.

She missed the stimulation of study and the joy of shared knowledge so prevailed on some of her friends to start a study club. The first year they ambitiously covered the vast continent of Russia and for many years followed a prescribed study course.

The club is still active, but is now a social group, interested in literature and topics of interest. Mrs. John Lyons is president of the club in 1969.

One of the club's major contributions to the town is the founding of the library in 1927 which later became tax supported. The club still contributes to the library and often has a coffee hour to raise money for its benefit.

#### MOUNT MELLICK CLUB

The Mount Mellick Club was started in 1903 and was primarily a needlework club. When Mrs. S. M. Erskine visited Scotland, she saw some beautiful embroidery originating on Mount Mellick. After she arrived home she started a club with 13 members.

In order to belong to the club, each member had to make a piece of work and show the others how to do it. They turned out some very fancy stitches.

Piper City Camp of Royal Neighbors of America was instituted May 25, 1908. Mrs. Mary E. Carr of Piper City is one of the 25 charter members who is still living here.

#### SERVICE CLUBS

Piper City has two service clubs which are very active and have done much for the betterment of the community.



Flying Farmers were much in vogue from 1949 to '55 and several local people got their pilot's license and were members. Among them were Durelle and Lorraine White who once were hosts to a Fly In Breakfast. Bob Bradbury is probably the most avid flying fan at present.

On April 6, 1939, 18 leading business and professional men affiliated with Rotary International and established the first service club in Piper City. Some of the worthwhile organizations the Piper City Rotary has backed and helped to develop are the Parent-Teacher Association, the Community Betterment Club which is now called the Council For Progress, the Fire Protection District, the Piper City Locker Association, the Piper City Fair Association (which sponsored the Horse Show for many years), the Home Guarantee and Loan Association and the Pella-Brenton United Charities.

This year the Rotary has an exchange student, Helen Ford, from Australia who has attended the high school here.

Another student, Mesfin Mariam, of Ethiopia



Mrs. Harold Bork is local weather observer and keeps records in 1969 for the United States Weather Bureau.

ADDITIONAL  
SCENES  
OF THE  
GREAT  
TRAIN  
WRECK





Mark and Danny Froelich wrote a letter to President Richard M. Nixon inviting him to the Centennial Celebration and received a letter from the White House. Each received a card with a facsimile of his signature.



The official start of the Centennial observation was held in March with the ceremony of burying the razor. Taking part were Mrs. Eugene Froelich, Mrs. Robert Zorn, Mitchell Johnston, Mayor and Mrs. Merle Harford.



Piper City's Peoria Ave. as it looks in 1969.



One of the worst storms to hit this area was the cyclone that demolished the buildings at the S. E. Wells home and of others on April 21, 1912.



A 1969 view of the north side business section.

came to Piper City under the American Field Service plan and stayed with Mr. and Mrs. H. A. McIntosh for the school year of 1965-66.

Helen Ford has visited the Everett Thorndyke family and is now staying with the J. D. Somers. She may visit other families before returning home next January.

The Lions Club received its charter from Lions International on January 24, 1956 and has been very active in raising funds for the community in its 13-year history.

It has put up street signs, trash receptacles, and marked parking spaces on the main streets. Members have helped in erecting the park pavilion, have conducted auto safety checks, have had several community sales and sponsored the Little League baseball. It also helped with the Council For Progress.

The Home Extension Clubs are popular with Piper City women. They were at one time called Home Bureau Units. The Pella Home Bureau Unit met for the first time with Mrs. Howard Stuckey in 1928. This unit sponsored the first 4-H Clubs, and through their efforts the first hot lunch programs were served at the Piper City school.

The Brenton Home Bureau Unit was established October 7, 1936. The first president was Mrs. Clair Bishop. There is still a Brenton Home Extension Club and there is a Modern Mrs. Home Extension Club.

The 4-H Clubs and the Scouting program for both boys and girls are flourishing in Piper City.

Some clubs have come and gone and some that have gone are the Senior and Junior Woman's Clubs, the Ever Ready Club and the Parent-Teacher Association.

#### **"NOW GENERATION"**

As we come to the conclusion of our account of past events and move into the present, trying to keep abreast of the "Now Generation" we cannot foresee the future for our town or for our citizens. The land is filled with great hope and great despair.

We can only savor the good of the past and work toward a future here that seems to be filled now with a bright promise.

This is a history, not of one person or of one family, but of a community that has learned to live in relative harmony with love and support for each other. Could we ask more for the future?



Aerial view of FS Seeds at the southwest edge of town contrasts old and new. The modern hybrid seed plant is directly across from the site where Thomas Jeffery operated a nursery in the 1800's. He planted the row of pine trees directly across from FS on Route 115.

*Memoranda --*

# *Memoranda --*

Conn's 169 Foodliner

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